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DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT'S

COMICS INTERVIEW

#29

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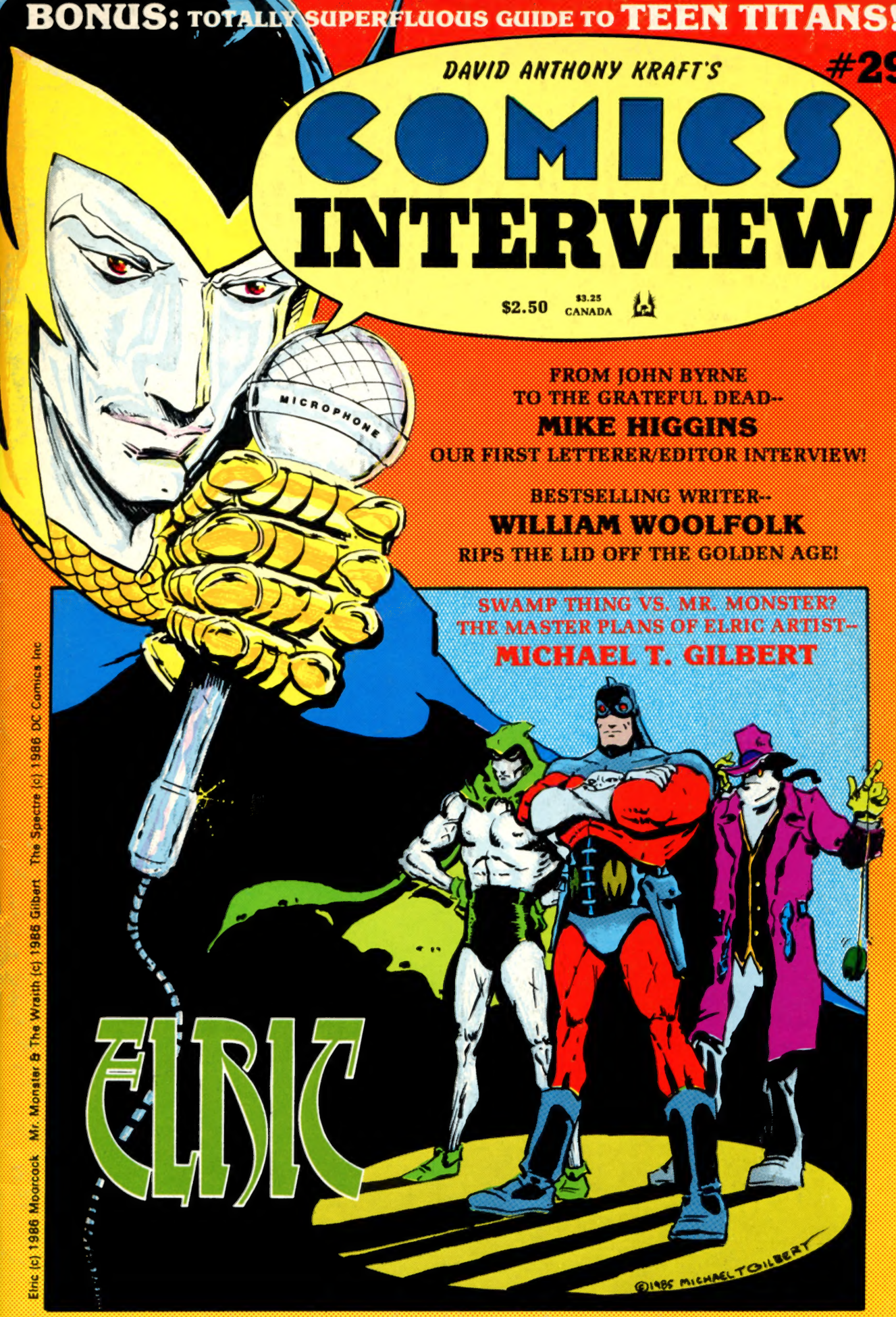
FROM JOHN BYRNE
TO THE GRATEFUL DEAD--
MIKE HIGGINS
OUR FIRST LETTERER/EDITOR INTERVIEW!

BESTSELLING WRITER--
WILLIAM WOOLFOLK
RIPS THE LID OFF THE GOLDEN AGE!

SWAMP THING VS. MR. MONSTER?
THE MASTER PLANS OF ELRIC ARTIST--
MICHAEL T. GILBERT



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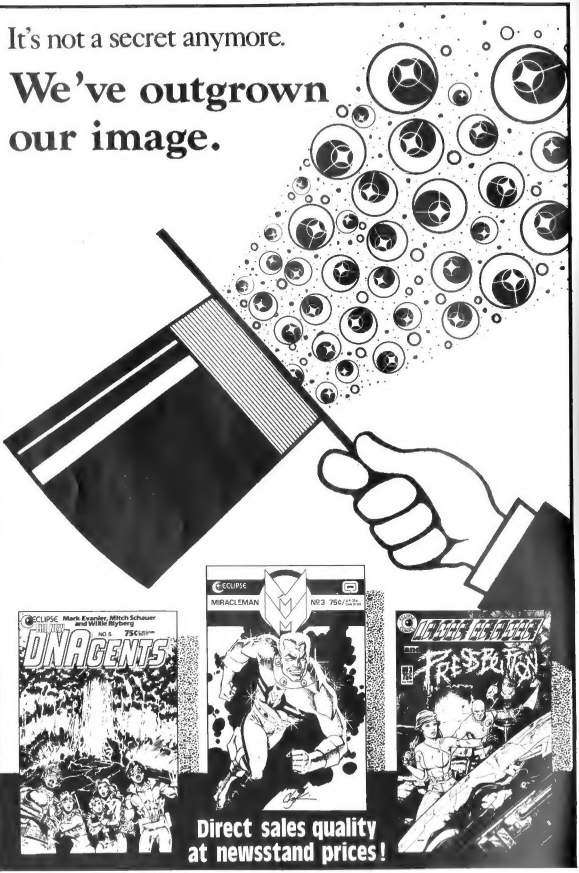

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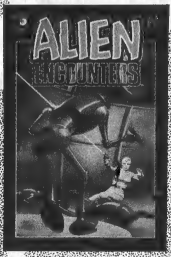
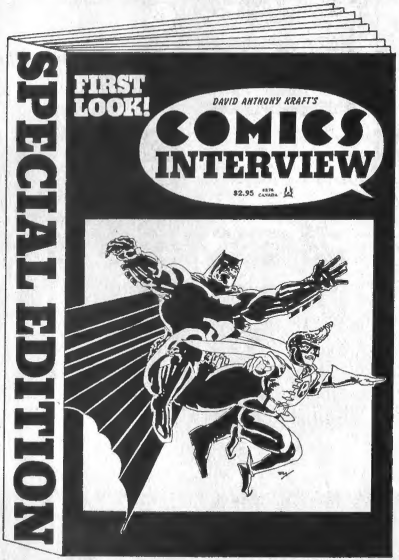


ECLIPSE COMICS

Comics worth reading!

FRANK MILLER'S DARK KNIGHT

Issue #31 of David Anthony Kraft's COMICS INTERVIEW features a DARK KNIGHT cover by Miller and an exclusive and very revealing inside interview with Frank that offers an advance look at his stunning new DC series, complete with illustrations and even sequences from the first and second issues of DARK KNIGHT!



Also in COMICS INTERVIEW #31 --

FRED FINGER, son of the man who is the Dark Knight's forgotten co-creator, shares the sad secrets of his father's life. BOB KANE offers a candid conversation about the creation of The Batman. We take you from the First Batman Story behind the scenes into a seldom-seen side of comics, all the way to Miller's Last Batman Story!

ALL THIS -- AND MUCH, MUCH MORE IN ISSUE #31...

Sure to be a sales sensation -- so order accordingly.

CREDITS

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT
editor/publisher

conceived by
JIM SALICRUP
editorial and design consultant

LESLEY BENJAMIN-AULL
managing editor emeritus

DARREL BOATZ
MARK BURBEY
LOU MOUGIN
DWIGHT JON ZIMMERMAN
contributing editors

MARK BORAX
production

RICK JAGUS
typesetting

BILL BLACK
BRUCE BRISTOW
SYLVIA GARTHWAITE
CAROL KALISH
ED O'NEAL
STEVE SAFFEL
TIM TURNER
special thanks

SHEL DORF
MARK EVANIER
west coast correspondents

MARTIN W. HERZOG
canadian correspondent

BEAU PEEPS
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cover contributed by:
MICHAEL T. GILBERT
art & colors

DAVID G. C. HAMILTON
sepa with style

Art: Jim Salicrup

UP FRONT

I'm back -- by popular demand.

So where have I been? Or, to put it as several of you did, what happened to the editorials? Quite honestly, it was my intent to retire from writing them altogether, a decision I hoped would go unnoticed but which immediately drew attention from all quarters.

Gary Groth wanted me to write an editorial about **Jack Kirby's** differences with Marvel over the return of artwork. **Jim Salicrup** wouldn't let a single conversation slip by without making a pitch for my presence here on the editorial page. Old friends and new acquaintances made pointed inquiries about the absence.

Actually, I've been behind the scenes at COMICS INTERVIEW all along, as always -- like the man behind the curtain, pulling the strings of the Great & Powerful Oz. The absence of an editorial was my way of saying, "Pay no attention to that man behind the curtain!" but, alas, just as little Toto insistently tugged aside the veil and forced him to step forth, I've been (dare I use the word?) hounded out of hiding.

Of course, there's a bit more to it than that, which I'll save for the subject of next month's editorial. Suffice it to say, DAK is back.

Take care and stay aware!

-DAVID

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"I don't know whether Weisinger was

"William the Conquerer," May 15th, 1948, at Will Lieberson's house.

more offensive bullying or groveling."

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WILLIAM WOOLFOLK

Last issue, in Part One of his interview, Golden Age comics writer Bill Woolfolk spoke candidly of his career scripting such titles as BATMAN, SUPERMAN, CAPTAIN AMERICA, THE SPIRIT, CAPTAIN MARVEL, PLASTIC MAN, BLACKHAWK, ARCHIE and just about all the other top heroes of the day. One of the highest paid Golden Age comics writers, Bill soon branched out into scripting for television, writing newspaper columns and best-selling novels. Bill remains "Extravagantly fond of comics," and after 34 years he's taken time away from his other writing chores and returned to script a new story for ACTION COMICS (#576). Last month, he also gave away the secret of his successful career — "I wrote anything that came along."

LOU: *So you started writing SUPERMAN in the late Forties or early Fifties, right?*

BILL: Actually, I had a principle of, "Write for four firms at once." Even though the pressure was tremendous to work — you know, to get more stories out — I thought it was safer than working for only two or three companies. If one of them has a slide-off or whatever then you're short of work. That would seem to me to be a greater calamity than being under pressure — so I always worked for four firms at a time. I had always been tempted to go to DC, but it was impractical at the time because there was CAPTAIN MARVEL at Fawcett and they were at war. So I sent Dorothy up to **Weisinger** — who she might have known before — to give him Superman stories which I actually wrote for her.

LOU: *She sold Superman stories under her name that you had actually written?*

BILL: And Lois Lane stories, which for the most part I wrote and, in some cases, I plotted and she wrote. Her strength was as a story technician, which is what everyone said — so I repeat what the common wisdom was.

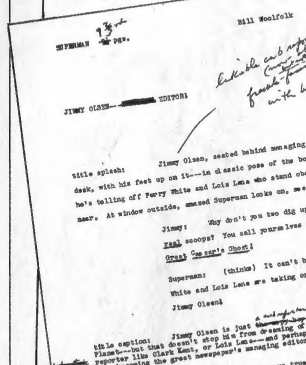
LOU: *So she sold your stories under her name? That's subterfuge.*

BILL: Yes, of course. *(Laughter.)* A swindle is what it was. In truth, I wanted to test my skills against **Mort Weisinger** and see how we did there.

LOU: *Did you ever start to work overground for him, in the open?*

BILL: Oh yeah. That was later. That was after CAPTAIN MARVEL had gone under, or was nearly going under. I don't remember quite how I got to doing it. He was friends with Dorothy and myself, and he would come out to visit us and we had dinners together. We were like tigers walking around each other in a cage. I was this well-known writer

"Stan Lee: the ego that walked like a man."


SUPERMAN
Bill Woolfolk
JIMMY OLSEN
EDITOR!
title splash:
Jimmy Olsen, seated behind managing editor's
desk, with his feet up on it—in classic pose of the boss, as
he's telling off Perry White and Lois Lane who stand obediently
near. At window outside, amazed Superman looks on, sees this.
Jimmy:
Why don't you two dig up some
REAL scoops? You call yourselves reporters!
Great Caesar's Ghost!
Superman: (thinks) It can't be! Perry
White and Lois Lane are taking orders from—
Jimmy Olsen!
title caption;
Flame—but that doesn't stop him from dreaming of becoming a—
reporter like Clark Kent, or Lois Lane—and perhaps, someday,
even becoming the great newspaper's managing editor—like Perry
White!
Well, day-dreams ARE some true—and this
is one of them—as you will find out when you read this
tale of how SUPERMAN, mighty man of steel, saved
JIMMY OLSEN—
EDITOR!

A long-lost title page from a SUPERMAN script Bill wrote under his own name for Mort Weisinger, discovered by Jim Steranko, who says: "If there's ever a time that someone gets around to writing my bio., they'll probably mention my escape magic, sleight of hand and stage illusions and never know about one of my most difficult tricks, that of producing a 30-year-old manuscript out of thin air. Nothin' to it really, It's all done with mirrors." According to Bill: "The crossouts are mine, the added words are Weisinger's."

and he was this editor that would love to get me there. He wanted me like a trophy. He'd invited me to come over, and I never did until the time came, I guess, when I either needed it or thought it was a good idea.

LOU: *Well, I heard from Arnold Drake — who I guess worked briefly with him in the late Fifties — that he was a pretty darn tough guy to work with. In fact, he said, "Only a depraved person would work for Weisinger."*

BILL: It's not hard to say, because I can't think of anyone that I had more contempt for than I had for **Weisinger.**

LOU: *He was that hard to work for, huh?*

BILL: My opinion of **Weisinger** would have to improve a great deal before it changed into contempt. As a person. As an editor, within the context of the times, he was very good. I think he was a very artful fake — in the sense that he would turn down a story of mine and then give it to another writer. And abscond with the story of that writer and give it to me — the idea that is. It was that kind of switching around and other stuff. He would play crazy games. He would say, "You people at Fawcett, you failed with a lot of stories over there" — as though I were Fawcett, which I wasn't — "and we have never cancelled a magazine. NEVER had a cancel." I said, "That's a lie, Mort." He said, "Name — go ahead — I dare you to name me any magazine we have ever dropped." At that time, I knew comics very well 'cause I had studied it a lot, so I named, like, six. He said, "Oh. You know them." *(Laughter.)*

LOU: *What did everybody else do — crack up?*

BILL: I think it was just Dorothy and his wife and me there, and she said, "Why be an idiot? Why play such ridiculous games with people?" He was so cruel to other writers. As I said, we were tigers in a cage, so we had no problems except that we were wary of each other. I would see what he would do to another writer, and I would tell him, "You see **Vampire Weisinger** drinking everyone's blood."

LOU: *Such as Otto Binder?*

BILL: **Otto Binder. Bill Finger** particularly. **Bill Finger**, he jumped on with both feet and would grind into the mud, and then lift him up and say, "See how humiliated you are," and then grind him into the mud again. One time, when I protested, he said, "I don't like you saying that in front of everybody — about vampires and that sort of stuff." So I said, "Mort, you've earned it." He said, "Well, the way I look at it, a writer is like an orange. You squeeze them until there's no juice left in them and then you throw them away." And you're talking about **Bill Finger**, a guy who owed his life practically and was in terrible desperate trouble, and I bodily restrained myself from going to **Weisinger** and giving him a punch in the face.

LOU: *Not a fun type person to work for...*

BILL: And he worked for *me* later, you know, in magazines, where he handled the magazine and made a lot of money — but I have never met a man more determined to be obnoxious than he was. I don't know whether he was more offensive when he was bullying or when he was groveling. *(Laughter.)*

LOU: *Whatever they called themselves, Timely, Atlas or Marvel — the people that put out CAPTAIN AMERICA — who did you work with there?*

BILL: I went over there first when Dorothy was there. That's how we met.

LOU: *She was an editor there?*

BILL: She was an editor there in **Stan Lee's** absence.

LOU: *Oh, that's right, he was drafted...*

BILL: ...in the Army. There was a guy named **Vince Fago** there. Vince was a very sweet person who... uh, he had a couple of nervous breakdowns. He would not be disturbed even by the worst problem there. He once told me, "If someone wants to write, why shouldn't they?" *(Laughter.)* So he bought stories on that basis.

LOU: *Yeah. I have seen some later Timelys, so I think I can confirm that.*

BILL: Dorothy was working for him. That's where we met. That's how we started to date. Down at Timely. Shortly thereafter, **Stan Lee** did return and Dorothy and he were immediately not meant for each other. I don't think he even wanted anyone around who was, in any sense, a challenge. **Stan Lee** was the ego

"Weisinger wanted me like a trophy."

that walked like a man . . . *(laughter)* . . . and I think she quit. I was never quite sure, I cannot be positive, but I think she quit and she went over to **Max Gaines'**.

LOU: *Which was DC.*

BILL: Yeah. He was downtown at 225 Lafayette at the time. And it was through Dorothy that I sold ANIMAL FABLES to **Max Gaines.**

LOU: *Okay, let's see. Steranko says, "Next, the Wolfolks team in Orbit."*

BILL: Orbit Comics was run by **Rae Hermann**.

LOU: *Was that a man or a woman?*

BILL: It was a woman, give or take a little. *(Laughter.)* She put out a couple of titles, a couple of romance things, which Dorothy edited for her, after awhile. I was her chief and almost only, writer, I think. She was, like, my fourth of the four publishers. I had three major publishers, and I worked for her because she was so easy to write for, since there was no editor there. There was no anything. I could do anything I chose. She put out an imitation of **Charlie Biro**'s CRIME DOES NOT PAY called WANTED. And she put out a western called WILD BILL PECOS, as I recall. It never occurred to her, and I would sometimes point out — it shows you what a sloppy operation it was: **Mort Leav** was drawing it, but she was also giving work to **Sid Shores**. You can't think of two more diametric opposites! Sid's face of Bill Pecos had nothing whatsoever in common with **Mort Leav**'s, and yet they were both in the same issue — and that never struck her as important!

LOU: *That's probably what you have when you don't have an editor.*

BILL: Right. As a "story technician" who's won his spurs in comic books, magazines, movies, television and books, I am convinced that *any* story can be improved at least 25% by an editor or rewriter who understands not only the mechanics but the principles of narration. A poor story can be improved at least 100%, which I've proved time and again — too often in my own work. Anyway, comics were fading. 1949 was a peak, I think, as I recall, because I was on a television show at the time, appearing for a friend. And I remember they asked me about comics and I said, "They absolutely own the world." And the next day I think Fawcett dropped sixteen books.

LOU: *Oh, lord.*

BILL: And it struck me that perhaps they don't own the world. They were all romance books that slipped and just came to an abrupt end. With this in mind, I had been looking to publish. I had, as I said, been the top-paid author, really — I don't think anyone ever got a higher page rate than I did, and I was pretty prolific. *(Laughter.)* So, I had acquired a certain amount of money and I was willing to go into publishing with it. **Murray Boltinoff** had met a guy named **John Musakia** who was the art director at McGraw-Hill and said that he should get together with me. Murray knew about my wanting to go into publishing, and sure enough **Musakia** and I met and put out four of those pocket-sized magazines. Remember LOOK magazine? LOOK also had four little tiny pocket-things. I don't see those type publications around hardly at all anymore. Maybe like DELL purse-sized booklets — a little larger than that, I think. I put out four of those with **John Musakia**: TOPS, REWARD, SPEED, and something else — I forget. The fourth one was the problem, 'cause if you printed four together you got a helluva lot cheaper price. You could put them all on one press. But I couldn't get a fourth one that made it. The fourth one would always eat up the profits of the other three — which was not a great way of publishing. And I was asking at this stage, "What *does*

A bunch of books by Bill.

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WC WD
william woolfolk
THE BEST-SELLING AUTHOR OF
THE BEAUTIFUL COUPLE
THE FUTURE IS HERE...THE HORROR IS NOW
THE SENDAI
WILLIAM WOOLFOLK

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ANOTHER Renegade Press PUBLICATION!

"Comics then paid two dollars a page."

© 1983 William Woolfolk

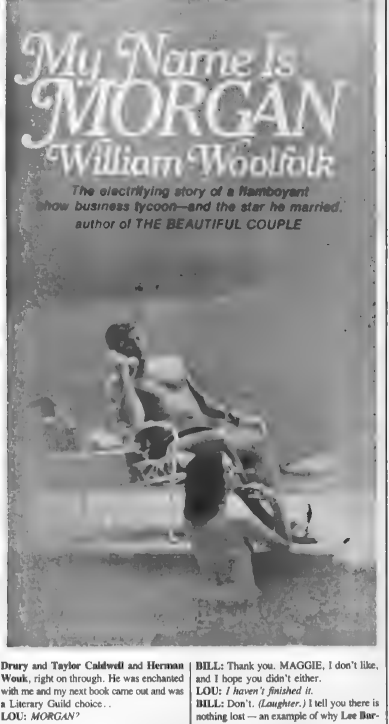
sell in this goddamn field?" And he said, "*Expose* magazines." And I said, "What do you mean, like CONFIDENTIAL? I have no gossip." *(Laughter.)* "I have no people that know anything about anybody." He said, "Well, I'm selling very well, and we even have these cheap imitations like SUPPRESSED and other things." And I said, "Okay. I'll try it." And at that stage I got in touch with Mort Weisinger, and he did most of the INSIDE STORY things to start with. So every time he came back to complain, which he did regularly — which he had always done at DC also . . . You push up to the point where they fire you and then you know you can't go any further. *(Laughter.)* And he kept pushing and pushing and I kept doing more and more of the book. He worked for me — I paid him an awful lot of money, 'cause we made an awful lot of money for a while there. He put up $2500 and he got one-third interest in the magazine for that — and he was as worried as you ever saw a man be . . .

LOU: *Was he still working on SUPERMAN?*

BILL: Oh, yeah. He wasn't worried about that. He was worried about his $2500. And he went, "My God, this'll be a lesson to me forever. I'll learn never to trust anybody if anything ever happens to that $2500." He put up $2500 and he got back very many thousands. And then, when things turned more sour, I said, "Look, Mort, at this stage I don't really think I can keep paying you. I don't think I can keep paying you $300 a week here in view of falling off profits. And he said, "Oh God, Bill, don't cut off my lifeline." And I said, "Mort, I will not, provided you understand that I may be overpaying you here." And, of course, I did overpay him, and then when I tried to get it back — he refused to pay, saying I was stealing bread out of his family's mouth.

LOU: *Was this about the time that you started writing the mainstream novels like MAGGIE and MY NAME IS MORGAN?*

BILL: I wrote my first paperback novel, called THE NAKED HUNTER, in 1953 for Popular Library. That was right when I went into publishing. You see, I did that along with comics until I got into publishing, and then I got into publishing and then the book came out and it sold very well. And my wife, Dorothy, was quite upset, saying I should not have gone into publishing, I should have stayed in that and been a famous suspense writer. I wrote three paperback suspense novels: THE NAKED HUNTER, RUN WHILE YOU CAN, and THE WAY OF THE WICKED. Meanwhile, I had met **Lee Barron Burker III**, who was, I think, the top commercial editor in the whole of publishing. He was the top editor at Doubleday and had every author you can name from **Allen**


My Name Is
MORGAN
William Woolfolk
The electrifying story of a flamboyant show business tycoon—and the star he married.
author of THE BEAUTIFUL COUPLE

Drury and **Taylor Caldwell** and **Herman Wouk**, right on through. He was enchanted with me and my next book came out and was a Literary Guild choice. .

LOU: *MORGAN?*

BILL: Yeah. . . . and a Doubleday Book Choice. And I decided, "Fine. I will be an author."

LOU: *The first one of yours I read was MY NAME IS MORGAN, and I like that one quite a bit. .*

BILL: Thank you. MAGGIE, I don't like, and I hope you didn't either.

LOU: *I haven't finished it.*

BILL: Don't. *(Laughter.)* I tell you there is nothing lost — an example of why **Lee Burker** was not a good editor for me. I had written OPINION OF THE COURT, and they all thought that was the Big Book. "*The* Big Book." They really did. Everybody at Doubleday came and told me, "Poor **Allen Drury** is coming out against you." Well,

NO. seven

PETER HSU'S QUADRANT

Hellrazor! the final chapter.

Tara Ballance's sword and sorcery saga, which began in Quadrant #1, concludes in a stunning climax this issue. Trace the fate of Orista the Warrior Woman, as well as her friends, the Gauntlet, Ryan the Elf and Gogmagog the Great.
Story: Tara Ballance. Art: Peter Hsu

Sleazoids: Travesty of Justice
Travesty, on orders of her superiors, surrenders to her old enemy, Stevron Slagg. To her surprise, it is not Slagg who poses the greatest danger, but the hostage she seeks to free...
Story and art: Peter Hsu

The Girl who can see Tomorrow
A disturbing science fiction short story about a guy who picks up a girl...
Story and Art: Steve LeBlanc

Quadrant #7 is limited to a 5000 run only. Cover Price is $1.95. Interior artwork is B/W halftone on white premium newsprint and the cover is color separated.

Quadrant #7 will ship during April to May, 1986!

Quadrant #7 is recommended for mature adults.

Andromeda * Alternate Reality * Capital City * Friendly Frank's * Glenwood * Multi-Books * Second Genesis * Sunrise * Styx

"Only third-rate writers were editors."

they were wrong. *(Laughter.)* SHADE OF DIFFERENCE buried OPINION. He didn't want me to cut OPINION, but I told him it got much too big. It's ponderous even for me. And he said, "If you cut it, you will cut out a bestseller." So I let it go and that was wrong.

I went down to Barbados, and he came flying down to see my next book, which he had already given me twelve pages of notes of what was wrong with it — all of which I quite agreed with 'cause I had showed him the first draft. I write terrible first drafts. Three weeks later he comes down to Barbados and he wants to read the book, and I said, "Sure, but it's hardly any better." He went off that night and read it and came back later and said, "It's ready and it's going." And I said calmly, "I don't even have the carbon for Chrissake! I haven't begun to take the things out of it." He said, "READER'S DIGEST is waiting for this. They have a spot for it. It's all set. You gonna turn down $100,000?"

I'm talking to the top commercial editor in the whole field and I said, "What the fuck do I know?" *(Laughter.)* Sure, let him go. It's also a great relief to get paid, you know. They pay you half down on signing the contract and the other half on delivery.

LOU: *This is OPINION OF THE COURT?*

BILL: No. We're talking now about a book called THE BUILDERS. I was so fond of him that my concern was if the plane went down he would lose my goddamn script and I didn't have a carbon. *(Laughter.)*

LOU: *This is before Xerox, right?*

BILL: Right. He was not a good editor for me.

LOU: *Just for the heck of it, I want to ask you how was it you came to write the Batman paperbacks — BATMAN VS. THREE VILLAINS OF DOOM, and BATMAN VS. THE FEARSOME FOURSOME — as Winston Lyon?*

BILL: I had done another book called CRIMINAL COURT under that name, when I was doing THE DEFENDERS television series. The reason is my name is **William Winston Woolfolk**, and Winston was **Lyon**, and that was also my mother's maiden name.

LOU: *But how did you come to write the Batman paperbacks?*

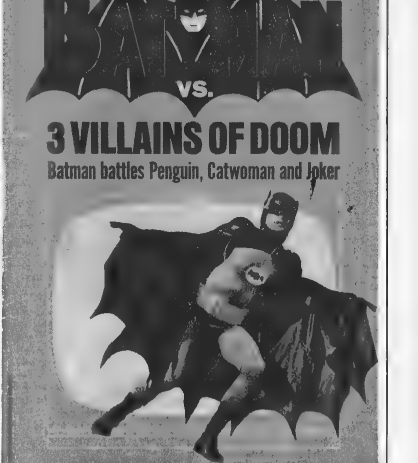
BILL: That is tied in with Mort, too. Our careers were flung together... mutual antipathy or whatever. Antipathy from my point of view. I don't think he ever did feel so. He kept saying, "You're the only one that will cry at my funeral." He was wrong. *(Laughter.)* However, I had just finished OPINION OF THE COURT. I had not signed for another book yet, and Mort said, "How would you like to do these couple of Batman things?" He said, "Would you write them?" And I said, "Well, if I can write ten or twelve pages a day I can get done in two weeks." And whatever they were paying me was good pay, so that's what I did. And they liked them a good deal. As a matter of fact, they called up Mort and **Jack Liebowitz** to say how much they liked them, and as a result of that later Mort got his book about Miss America.

LOU: *THE CONTEST?*

BILL: What had happened is, I was doing this book called THE BEAUTIFUL COUPLE for New American Library, which ended up selling a million copies.

LOU: *Sternako mistitled it THE BEAUTIFUL PEOPLE.*

BILL: Everyone called it that, because "beautiful people" was a catchword at the time. That was a mistake everybody made, including my own agent. *(Laughter.)* THE BEAUTIFUL COUPLE actually started out with a different name entirely — THE COUPLE — but then out came **Updike** with COUPLES and so we changed it to BEAUTIFUL COUPLE. That sold a million copies and, of course, **Ed Kuen**, who was the head of N.A.L. at the time, said, "What we want from you now is another book right away." And I said, "I can't. I've gotta go back and finish THE BUILDERS." And he said, "Can you think of anybody?" And I felt, well, Mort had gotten me the Batman thing and I owed him a favor back, and I said, "I have this guy who's written a lot of non-fiction stuff" — which he had, you know,



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WILLIAM WOOLFOLK

'READER'S DIGEST is waiting for the

"I just wrote a SUPERMAN story (the first in 34 years!)"

for other magazines — "I can't swear for his prose style. I have a suspicion that it moves like a river under ice or something. . . *(laughter)* "... but nonetheless, there is a guy who possibly can do it, and one thing he is good at and always was" — and that is true — "is gimmicks." You know, one gimmick on top of another gimmick on top of another gimmick.

LOU: *Oh, yes. I know.*

BILL: If you can't move the story forward you pile it up. *(Laughter.)* And I said, "He can give you all kinds of gimmicks and all the research about Miss America and stuff." And that's how Mort got it — for 25 Grand a dance, which is absolutely unprecedented for a new writer.

LOU: *I bet it didn't endear him any to Bert Parks when that thing came out, though!*

BILL: Uh, I never read it. *(Laughter.)* I turned to the last page where everybody was surprised that Miss America was a whore. . .

LOU: *"The princess was a whore." That's the last line. Yeah, I think everybody's probably looked to the last page of that book, but I don't know anybody who's read it.*

BILL: I knew what Mort would write like, and there is nothing to be learned there, really. I'll read anybody who'll teach me something.

LOU: *Can you tell me something about how you got into writing the TV show, THE DEFENDERS? I have to make the distinction because there's a comic book called THE DEFENDERS, and I want people out there to know this is about lawyers and not about a wizard and a huge green guy and several others.* (Laughter.) *In fact, the publisher of COMICS INTERVIEW wrote THE DEFENDERS comic book for Marvel, so now we differentiate — this is not about super-heroes, folks. Go ahead, Bill.*

BILL: I had really not published MY NAME IS MORGAN. For a long time. . . you know **Reginald Rose?**

LOU: *Yeah. Everybody knows Reginald Rose. TWELVE ANGRY MEN.*

BILL: Yes. And he was one of the Golden Age of TV writers. He was always of the belief — this is the term he used — that I was the godfather of writers. . .

LOU: *Oh, wow.*

BILL: . . . largely because I was writing and making a living at it when he was still in the advertising business. Then he started in writing — TV and stuff — and at one stage or another while he was writing he offered, "Let's open an office together and share and share alike." Damn fool that I was, I didn't. *(Laughter.)* Actually, I was very strongly tempted, but right then he got a movie offer on one of his things and he said, "I'll throw that into the pot, too." And I said, "No, you will not. I'm gonna start off half-a-movie behind before I get in there?" It so happened that the movie deal fell through, but by the time it had, time had gone by and we just never did get to be partners.

LOU: *I do have one of the paperbacks adapted from THE DEFENDERS — "All the Silent Voices."*

BILL: That was one of my scripts, but it was not my paperback. That was adapted by somebody else. What they had to do was pad it out and put in different little twists, in order to make it look like a book.

LOU: *That one had to do with birth control, and the pill was illegal back then. It's amazing, in this day and time, for me to look back and read something and realize that you could actually get sent to jail for disseminating information on birth control back then.*

BILL: Yeah, you could. Until **Harry Pilpole** won that argument in the state of Connecticut. It was the first time anyone got the right to do it. We took great stands, in that sense, and we ended up with both feet firmly planted in mid-air when it came to a resolution.

LOU: *Well, my girlfriend will never forgive me if I don't ask you this one — by any*

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story. You gonna turn down $100,000?''

chance did you ever meet William Shatner?

BILL: Did I meet . . ? Oh god, often, yeah. He did several DEFENDERS

LOU: *What was your opinion of him as an actor — or should I ask?* (Laughter.)

BILL: Well, I have not a strong opinion about him as an actor. In the first couple of THE DEFENDERS that I saw him in, I thought he was an extraordinarily attractive young man. Then I met him, of course, in story conferences — once I was in there being the story editor — and all I can tell you, I will tell you. I had either written or edited a script — I now forget which, since everything was rewritten entirely by us at THE DEFENDERS, hardly anything came through as it was — so I had a great hand in it. And I was somewhat taken aback at the end of a rehearsal when **Shatner** came to me and to Reginald and said, ''This script won't do.'' You know, this is, like, Tuesday for the reading and Wednesday you're going up to the studio. *(Laughter.)* To start, this is not the time to say this. All you could hope to do was give him one or two little changes, cosmetic changes as it were. I said, ''Well, I'm responsible for this, Bill. Tell me what you want done. What is wrong with it. We worked hard on it. We think it's a good script.'' He said, ''Oh, no. It's all wrong.'' And I said, ''How?'' He says, ''Well, it ends with the camera on this guy and there's no shot of me. And I'm the star.'' *(Laughter.)* That's his total complaint.

LOU: *Oh, lord. Captain Kirk's image falls about fifteen rungs with that one.* (Laughter.) *So okay — one thing about your writing — what do you think of it?*

BILL: My curse has always been versatility. They do not build statues of people saying, ''He was versatile.'' *(Laughter.)* What happens along the way is — you get pegged. Everybody knows what these top bestsellers will do. If you like **Ludlum** you know exactly what you will get with the next **Ludlum** book and the following **Ludlum** book. You know exactly what you will get with **Stephen King** and the next **Stephen King** book — within limits, you know. Open an **Alistair MacLean** book and you get **Alistair MacLean. Helen McGuiness** is **Helen McGuiness.** My personal problem is, if you like one book of mine, you are certain *not* to like the next — because I don't do the same book. So there I leave everybody baffled. My big bestseller, BEAUTIFUL COUPLE, they were furious at N.A.L. because they thought they had me pegged. On the paperback reprint they said I was going to be another **Irving Wallace**, or whatever the hell it is. Then I came out with THE BUILDERS — which doesn't have a scintilla of resemblance. I'm sure the readers' reaction — you know, they read THE BEAUTIFUL COUPLE and then along came THE BUILDERS — ''Oh, good Another book by **Woolfolk**.'' And what they got was a lot of nuts-and-bolts about building a building. Quite a boring book, as a matter of fact.

LOU: *Steranko told me that you just finished another novel, Bill. What's the name of that one?*

BILL: THE ADAM PROJECT. That came out and sank out of sight promptly.

LOU: *Are you going to be doing another one then?*

BILL: I am midway in one — but I am also midway in a play, and I'm also doing columns for syndicated things, and I'm also involved in a rather lucrative real estate deal — so I don't know what I'll do. *(Laughter.)* I'll finish it one of these days 'cause that's my business — to finish it.

LOU: *Let me try for a summing up statement. Do you think you got the bad writing out of your system, doing comics — or do you think it was a lot of good writing?*

BILL: I know your point. I think that comics were the best testing ground in the world for writing. Wasn't it **George Burns** who said that, in the old days, vaudeville was wonderful — because you had a place to go to be bad? It was not only a place to go to be bad, but for chronic experimenters like myself and people who were plot obsessed . . . and how does a plot actually work? Having been frustrated all my life by not knowing — writing for literary magazines and they all tell me, ''Well, you've written brilliantly, but not a good plot.'' *(Laughter.)* And I'm going, ''What is a plot?'' You had a chance to try it time and time again. Try and fail — try and fail. Build up a theory — destroy it. Build up a whole series of tests — tear them down to a few — you're doing four and five stories a week. Impossible in TV. Totally impossible in movies, where it takes a year. Totally impossible in books, also, where it takes a year. But here you're doing four or five stories a week. You have a chance to see if you add the conflict and it leads into the climax how that works, and try it again. Try all the various sorts of things. Spell out PLOTS, you know:

P — the Presentation
L — you're Launching it
O — the Obstacle
T — it's in Trouble
S — Solution

LOU: *That sounds all right.*

BILL: All kinds of things like that you would try — and discard, mostly

LOU: *So, that was the sum of your comics career — that it gave you the chance to experiment?*

BILL: I think you've got a thing that was marvelous for teaching plots. Oh, I wish I hadn't come down so hard on **Mort Weisinger**. The old Latin rule. *De Mort(uis) nil nisi bonum*, should have held me in restraint. As an editor he certainly had redeeming qualities. I really wish — and this is nostalgia — that comics would still pay in the same proportion that they payed back then. I made $15,000 a year when people were making $1000. Today, compared to whatever's the current pay, $18,000 to $20,000, I would be making $250,000 or $300,000 a year, and I would be doing comics. And comics I really liked! I'm not quite sure that comics have improved, as a matter of fact.

"Elric wasn't meant to be a comic book."

MICHAEL GILBERT

Upon reading in the back of MR. MONSTER #1 that Mike Gilbert had moved back to Berkeley, California, a mere 30-minute subway ride from my own residence in San Francisco, that proverbial light bulb of divine inspiration blinked on above my head and the next thing I knew I was on the telephone with Mike Friedrich arranging an interview with Michael T. Gilbert, best known for his work on ELRIC (in collaboration with P. Craig Russell and George Freeman) and the "new & improved" MR. MONSTER.

*Thus did I create the opportunity to meet an artist whose work I had followed and admired since the early '70s when he began publishing in a variety of fanzines and underground comics. Like many cartoonists, Mike Gilbert toiled in the fields of virtual obscurity for a number of years, slowly building a solid reputation as a rather unique and distinctive storyteller/cartoonist. It was through a fortuitous meeting with Mike Friedrich that Mike Gilbert eventually became a regular contributor to Star*Reach's assorted anthology titles and gained a devoted fan following for his Elsner-inspired creation, The Wraith, which made its debut in QUACK.*

While Elric hails from the gloomy and somber halls of Michael Moorcock's Melnibone and Mr. Monster takes residence in the dank and madcap Stearn Mansion, Mike Gilbert lives in the deceptively quiet suburbs of North Berkeley. The atmosphere in the pleasantly sunny house where he makes his studio was immediately relaxing and genial, and after getting acquainted over a cup of fresh-brewed coffee, we retired to the living room and settled into the following interview...

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Michael T. Gilbert
Occupation: Cartoonist
Born: 7 May 1951 — New York, NY
Training: Graduated from State University of New Paltz, in New York, with an Art Education degree.
Credits: ELRIC, MR. MONSTER, STAR*REACH, QUACK, IMAGINE, THE SPIRIT, DOPE COMIX, CEREBUS, WHO'S WHO: THE DEFINITIVE DIRECTORY OF THE DC UNIVERSE, AMERICAN SPLENDOR, DR. WIRTHAM'S COMIX & STORIES, VANGUARD, VORTEX, BIZARRE SEX, SLOW DEATH, STRANGE BREW, and NEW PALTZ COMIX, to name but a few.
Unrealized Ambition: To be rich and powerful.
Pet Peeve: Fads. The sheep mentality.

MARK BURBEY: *You worked with P. Craig Russell on the first six ELRIC comics. How is it different to now be working on ELRIC with George Freeman?*

MICHAEL GILBERT: There are a lot of differences. We're approaching the whole thing in a different way. In the original series, our basic structure was to start with a synopsis from **Roy Thomas**. Craig would then break the story down into very rough layouts and I'd go back over it, doing full pencils, which Craig would then ink. This

Michael T. Gilbert contemplating the clasics as research for the next ELRIC.

"Ditko, from all appearances, was doing the vast

varied to a certain extent. There were times when Craig would get more involved and he would wind up doing pencilling also, and on rare occasions I'd also do some of the inking, and then we'd both split the coloring, half and half. It was a full-time job for me. I was working exclusively on ELRIC at that stage of the game.

With the second series, I work directly from the novel. Roy had agreed to do synopses as usual, but I found myself more comfortable just working directly from the book instead of going through a third source. Then I lay out the story, do all the breakdowns. I sometimes wind up doing some of the pencilling, but usually just nice, detailed layouts. And then **George Freeman** does the finished inking and coloring and improves things as he sees fit.

MARK: *Does George do any final pencilling or does he just ink over your rough layouts?*

MICHAEL: It varies. There are times when my layouts are sufficiently polished that he can just ink right from that, and there are sometimes where I'll just give him a rougher indication of what should be there and he'll do the actual tight pencilling. And then, of course, it's sent to Roy; actually, from me it goes to Roy, who writes it and sends it to **Tom Orzechowski** and **L. Lois Buhalis** to letter it. Finally, it goes to George who does the final artwork and coloring. But it's kind of nice for me because I'm spending about half the time on the book now as I was on the first series — but in some ways I have a greater control over the series. I get to do the pacing of the story, who's saying what when, and that sort of thing. I find it much more satisfying, particularly since I feel one of my strong points has always been storytelling and layouts.

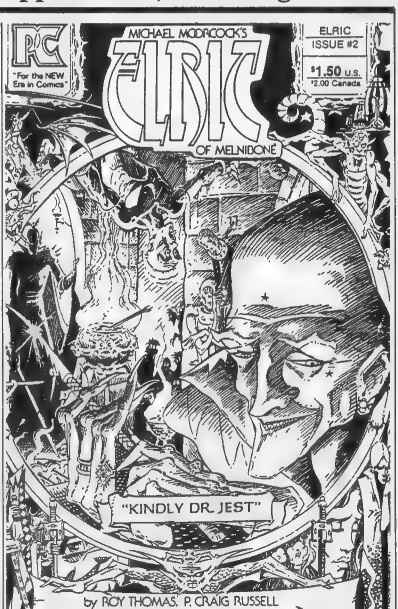
MARK: *Then Craig really controlled how the story flowed in the first series, since he was doing all the layouts?*

MICHAEL: For the most part. The way it actually worked out was that he would do about three-quarters, maybe four-fifths of the layouts, and I would do about one-quarter of the layouts. If something really appealed to me, I'd say, "Craig, let me do this," and I'd usually get a chance to do it, just to keep my hand in.

MARK: *The second ELRIC series was originally planned to be six issues, but eventually it was expanded to seven. Was this a result of working directly from the novel as opposed to Roy's synopses?*

MICHAEL: Yeah. The way that came to pass was that, the second book, SAILOR ON THE SEAS OF FATE, is basically divided into three separate stories comprising the book. I think **Moorcock** originally wrote it as three individual stories appearing in various places and then made it into a single novel, but it's three separate stories, inter-connected. And the first story was very dense. The original idea was to do one story every two issues, but the first story was so complex, and there was just so much going on, that the basic choice was either to drop a lot of what was in the book or to expand it. So I started talking to **Friedrich** and to Roy and to George and asked them if they would mind working on an extra issue if we could arrange it, and they said it was fine with them, and I checked out with Pacific, who was doing it at that stage of the game, and they okayed it. Once you see the first three issues, I think you'll understand just how much had to fit in. It would have been impossible to faithfully do the story in two issues unless it was just incredibly cramped, and we certainly didn't want to do that.

MARK: *Since George Freeman lives in Canada, you don't have the close working relationship that you had with Craig?*



One character, two companies, three artists. Pacific's ELRIC — Mike collaborating with Craig Russell.

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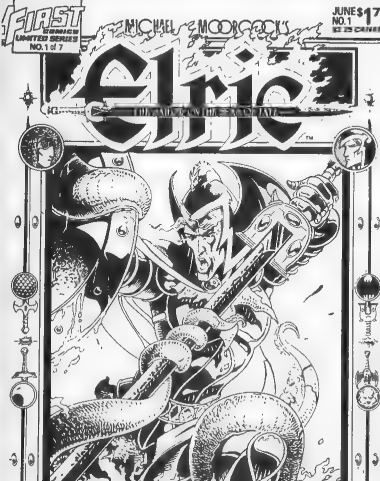
majority of the writing on SPIDER-MAN."



And First's ELRIC — Mike collaborating with George Freeman. Note subtle differences in style.

MICHAEL: No, it's a more distant relationship as far as that goes, but we talk on the phone quite a bit, we share ideas and such, and I think we have a pretty similar viewpoint of what we want to do with the book. Fortunately, we really like each other's work, so that makes things a lot easier.

MARK: *Who originally thought of George Freeman as Craig's replacement?*

MICHAEL: Mike Friedrich came up with the idea originally. In a way, things turned out to be quite different than they were originally planned. Initially, the deal was that I was going to try to get off the ELRIC book and Craig was going to stay on, and somehow or other Craig got involved in some other projects and decided not to do it at this stage of the game. He had been doing ELRIC for two-and-a-half years or so and I think he was a little in danger of getting burned out on the character. So, at one point both Craig and I were theoretically not going to continue with the book, and Mike Friedrich had asked George Freeman if he was interested in taking over, and he said he was. Interestingly enough, Craig and I had speculated on who we thought might be a good person to replace us if we had our choice, and George is one of the people we had mentioned. But Mike came up with this independently. Then, when the negotiations were going on with George, Mike suddenly discovered that George had agreed to do the book, assuming that I was going to be on the book doing layouts and such — which I hadn't been. Suddenly Mike gets back to me and says "Listen, George says he'll do the book but he wants you on it also. Are you interested?" Now, after being on ELRIC myself for a year-and-a-half, I was in danger of feeling a little burned out, too, but the idea of working with George was really exciting because I really respected his work, and the idea of doing all the storytelling, in effect being a different part of the equation, put a whole new complexion on the thing. So I said, "Sure, if George'll do it, I'll do it," and George said, "If Mike does it, I'll do it."

MARK: *Freeman's style already bears certain similarities to Russell's, but is there a conscious attempt to push it a bit further in that direction, to emulate Russell's style to a certain extent, to have the same look?*

MICHAEL: There's a certain amount of that, particularly in the first issue. We felt that we didn't want to jar the readers too much initially. As you say, George's style does bear certain surface similarities to Craig's style, and of course, my working with Craig for two years on ELRIC together, well, we came to a certain hybrid of our styles, so that carried on. But neither of us feels particularly strait-jacketed by having to follow what Craig's done. I think the further along we get, you'll start seeing more and more of our individual styles coming out.

MARK: *Looking at your pencil layouts for the second issue of the second series, it really does look like, as you say, a hybrid of your style and Craig's style, suggesting more of a subconscious influence, but these pencils look so much different than what I'm used to seeing by you.*

MICHAEL: Well, one of the things I always try and do in my own work is to develop a number of different art styles, to push in a lot of different directions. When I'm working with a certain artist, as a team, I try and go for their strengths. I try to accommodate my style to a certain degree so I can bring out the best in the artist I'm working with. So, again, there is a certain amount of Craig Russell in there, but since I've been working with George, I've found out that Georgie likes a lot of open panels. He likes a lot of scenes bleeding off the page, so I started designing the layouts and the

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"The Marvel way is a racket for writers."

storytelling and some of the artwork with that in mind. George enjoys my crazier layouts, so I try to go a little wild with certain things. You get some really strange things in #3, in particular.

MARK: *There wasn't much physical action in the first issue of the second series, yet there was a lot of visual variety.*

MICHAEL: It really was not meant to be a comic book. It was meant to be a novel and there really is nothing happening in the first part of the book on a physical plane, so I had to use all the techniques I had to keep the reader interested in reading about this thing, visually, and keep the plot moving. It was tricky, but I think it worked.

MARK: *I noticed a much more cinematic approach to some of the storytelling in that issue, such as the first four panels on page 6, the first three on page 7, and all of page 13. The storytelling is very animated and somehow reminiscent of Will Eisner.*

MICHAEL: Yeah, well of course, I was weaned on both **Eisner** and **Harvey Kurtzman**. I think of them when I think about that type of storytelling. Again, that's another difference between what Craig does and what I do. Craig's strength has always been his drawing ability, which leaves mine in the dust. My strength has always been with my storytelling ability. Pretty pictures alone don't do it. My first and foremost interest is telling a story, getting your eye moving, and holding your interest. Close second, are the pretty pictures. With Craig, I think it's been pretty pictures first, and then storytelling a very close second. He's an excellent storyteller himself, but my focus has always been more on that than his has, and I think it reflects in the book itself.

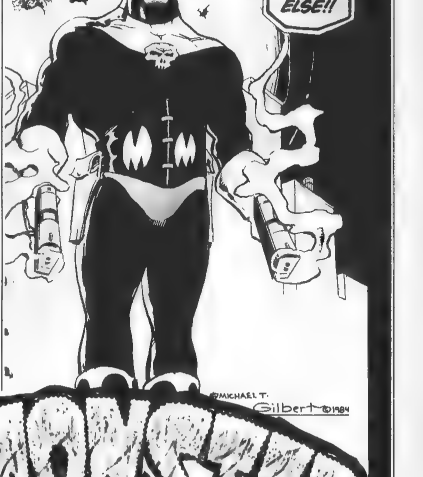
MARK: *The desired ideal, of course, is to combine pretty pictures with that same kind of storytelling?*

MICHAEL: Right, which is where George comes in, because he's an excellent artist and an excellent colorist. So we have my storytelling which hopefully moves the story around very well and pulls you into the story, and we have George doing the finished artwork, schmaltzing things up and making it look really sharp.

MARK: *Do you miss not doing any of the coloring?*

MICHAEL: Not a bit. I mean, among other things, if I want to get that out of my system I have MR. MONSTER, which I'm doing the coloring on, so that's fine with me. Coloring has always been something of a glorious chore. You want it done right and so you're willing to knock your head against the wall to keep doing all these coloring things. It's a very tedious, difficult process, but it can really set off the finished product quite a bit, so it's very important, which is why Craig and I chose to do it the way we did. And George is one of the best colorists in the business, so I can just say, "Have fun, George," and know the finished product is going to be great. One of the big considerations for George originally agreeing to do this job was because he really wanted to play around with full color, and he was able to experiment with the blueline method (a very good coloring method) which he hadn't had a chance to really do before extensively in a comic-book series.

MARK: *In doing the first ELRIC series, you worked in what is generally known as the "Marvel style," where Roy sends you a synopsis and you do the breakdowns and layouts from that. Does such a synopsis detail the action for each page or is it just a general description of what happens during the course of the story?*



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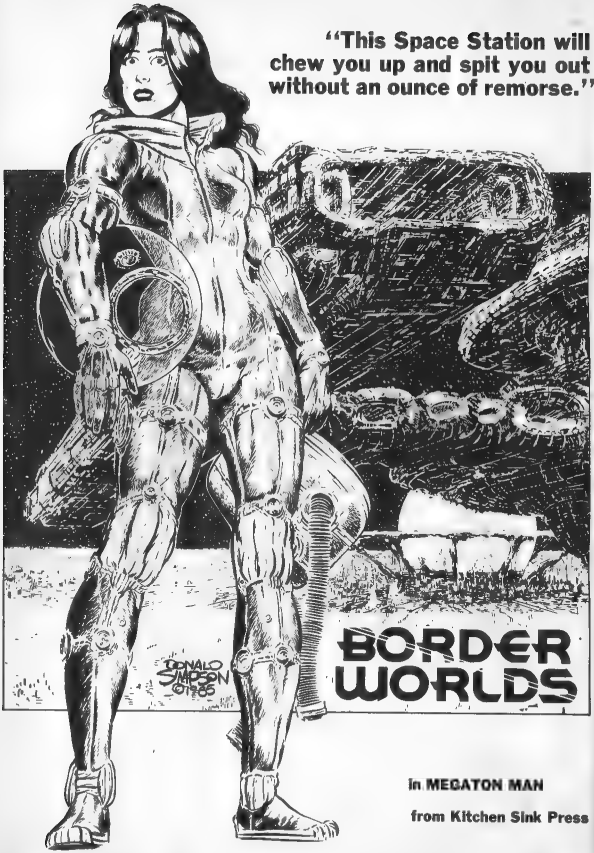
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"I didn't know ELRIC from a hole in the wall."

MICHAEL: It wasn't quite that detailed. What he would send would usually be something like six typewritten pages for an issue indicating, basically, some of the high points of the book and some of the things — particular points of emphasis — that we should be looking out for. And then Craig would sit down and go with the book and go with the synopsis and work out the layouts.

MARK: *I've always wondered how the Marvel style accounted for the injection of nuance into the storytelling — you know, the silences, the glances, those little in-between moments that create tension and atmosphere. But with ELRIC, at least, it sounds like it becomes the artist's responsibility, as he's working from the book in tandem with the synopsis, to determine the actual rhythm and supply the nuance...*

MICHAEL: One of the things Craig did last series and which I'm doing this time, is going to the book, drawing the layouts, doing the facial expressions. Then what I tend to do is to put a sheet of tracing paper over the finished artwork and indicate where some of the dialogue might possibly go, so that the pictures and the words can bounce off each other properly. Roy will then take it, and if he feels it works, will keep it, polish it up, improve it, or if he doesn't he'll just write something entirely different.

MARK: *It almost sounds like Roy really isn't doing all that much. It seems like the artists are doing practically all of it.*

MICHAEL: No, Roy has a valuable input into the book. He's an excellent craftsman. He can do excellent captions — he knows how to condense things. He's very good, in essence, as an editor, also. He has the work down. The final words that are down there are generally his, plus he has a very good reputation in the field which helps the sales of the book.

MARK: *Having never read any of the ELRIC novels, I was wondering how much was lifted directly from the book text-wise and how much was actually Thomas' own interpretation of the material.*

MICHAEL: Well, in general, we try to keep very close to the book whenever possible. We try to keep as much of the actual dialogue from the book as we can. But, of course, when you're dealing with a novel you're talking about this great sprawling thing and there are times when you just have to cut it down, which is where Roy comes in. He's very good at that.

MARK: *I've done some adaptations. I've done a couple of Kafka adaptations and I suppose you can do it either way, but I somehow like being able to do a full script before giving it to an artist. The artist should*

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"I was in danger of feeling burned out."

have the freedom of interpretation to play with the camera angles and things, too.

MICHAEL: Yeah, I would tend to feel the same way, but different writers have different methods of doing things. It was kind of surprising to me at first when I started doing the first ELRIC novel, because I'd never worked for Marvel. I'd heard about the Marvel method but I'd never actually seen this method of giving a synopsis, and it struck me as very strange initially. Of course, Craig had worked with Marvel quite a bit so he was able to adapt to it and eventually I started figuring out what was going on.

MARK: *So how do you feel about the Marvel method at this point? Does it actually afford you more personal freedom creatively, or does it somehow inhibit you, or what?*

MICHAEL: Well, for the very first issue of the second series Roy had made a plot synopsis of that section, and I found myself going crazy. It's very hard for me to just sit down with the book and try to lay it out according to what's going on there and get all the information down. To me, it was twice as hard trying to work with the book and with a synopsis. I'm just not used to working that way. I'm so used to writing and drawing my own material that trying to work with someone else's viewpoint of pacing and such, instead of making it easier, as it would with most artists, it just made it a lot more difficult for me. So I was able to talk to Roy and he graciously agreed to let me work right from the book.

MARK: *Then you basically prefer to handle that part of it yourself as opposed to doing it "Marvel style"?*

MICHAEL: Yes. As far as the Marvel way, in general, is concerned, I think it's really a great racket for the writers. There's no way we can get around it. The classic examples, as far as I'm concerned, are some of the early **Steve Ditko**, **Jack Kirby** creations. **Ditko**, from all appearances, was doing a vast majority of the writing on SPIDER-MAN.

MARK: *There was a point where the credits would read, "Plot by Steve Ditko"....*

MICHAEL: Towards the end. One of the things Steve was finally saying was, "Give me credit or else I'll quit." I'm just speculating on this, but I suspect that's the case. Stan had definitely made a good contribution; his dialogue was crisp, he had really good basic ideas, and he was an excellent editor. But the pacing and the characters and a lot of the other things seemed very much to be **Steve Ditko**'s work, and I don't think he was getting all the credit he deserved. That takes a lot of time and he was being compensated for the artwork, but I don't think he was compensated properly for the writing end of it. And I think that's what the Marvel writing method has evolved from. That's why one Marvel writer can write just reams of stuff, but it's a lot harder for the artist.

MARK: *Yeah, I often wonder how someone like Bill Mantlo can seemingly have this constant flow of ideas. Some of it I like, such as CLOAK & DAGGER, but then you see him doing stuff like SECTAURS. He has tons of stuff coming out and I wonder where it all comes from, but then the Marvel style seems to cut out that part where you sit down and write, page by page, the full script. As a writer, I like that part of it. You really feel like you've done your part, and then the artist does his part, and it's like an equal contribution. I may be wrong, but under the Marvel system, the artist seems to be doing almost more than the writer.*

MICHAEL: Yeah, again, this can vary according to the writer and the method he uses. **Harvey Kurtzman**, when he was doing his

NOW I UNDERSTAND HOW YOU CAME BY YOUR SURNAME---SERPENT-TAMER.*
I WAS NOT SURE MY SONG WOULD WORK ON THEM.
THEY ARE UNLIKE ANY SERPENTS I HAVE EVER SEEN IN THE SEAS OF MY OWN WORLD.

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"When Alan Moore says he likes your

FRONTLINE COMBAT and TWO-FISTED TALES stories, would actually lay it out. He would indicate everything, you know, the backgrounds, the facial expressions, he would actually rough draw it, which is my method on MR. MONSTER. One thing I found startling, which is exactly the opposite of what generally goes as the Marvel writing style. I'm working right now drawing a MR. MONSTER story that **Alan Moore** scripted. Generally, I'll do all the writing on MR. MONSTER, but I really love Alan's work and was just thrilled to be working with him on a project. He sent me a script for a MR. MONSTER story, it's a 16-page story . . .

MARK: *An original story on his part, or a story written from your plot?*

MICHAEL: Just from him. I sent him some copies of the first MR. MONSTER issue and a synopsis of a couple of other stories that I'm doing so he could get an idea of the character and the flavor that I'm trying to get and everything else. But from then on it's just, you know, I have enough respect for Alan to know he was going to do a tremendous job, which he did. It was a 16-page story he sent in, and what he sent in was single-spaced, typewritten, 40 pages. *Forty pages.* In this thing he would describe panel shots, dialogue, background information, motivation of the characters — I mean, everything was there. This man had visualized everything and put it down. I think it's extremely rare to see that kind of work put into a general comic-book story. There are some writers who will do that . . .

MARK: *I think Doug Moench might be one of those writers who supplies just reams of information.*

MICHAEL: Yeah, I suspect him, and I should think **Don McGregor** would probably be another one who does that kind of detail. People who really get into the work. And generally, that's going to reduce their output, because that takes a lot of extra time

MARK: *But for someone who is new to the American comic scene and who devotes this level of energy and attention to the work, as Alan Moore apparently does, he seems to be producing a lot of material and maintaining a consistent level of quality.*

MICHAEL: Well, it's very obvious to me that he must be sleeping about half-an-hour a night. *(Laughter.)* He probably sends postcards to his wife so she knows he's still alive. I mean, it's the only way he can produce as much as he's doing and keep the quality up that he's been keeping.

MARK: *Are you really into the Elric character at this point? Do you really enjoy doing it?*

MICHAEL: Oddly enough, yes. When I started doing the first series, I had not read any **Moorcock** and I didn't really know Elric from a hole in the wall, and I sort of had mixed feelings about the character at first. I was a little cool on the stories in the beginning. As I was reading more of it I got more into it. Certain aspects of the character tended to disturb me a little bit.

MARK: *Such as?*

MICHAEL: Well, there seems to be a real tendency for whining in the character. He's always complaining that life is treating him bad, and doom and gloom . . .

MARK: *Wishing he'd never been born . . .*

MICHAEL: That sort of thing. As I got

Three variations on a theme. Below: Mike's pencil sketch and finished cover of First's ELRIC, SAILOR ON THE SEAS OF FATE #3. Opposite page: Rejected original cover sketch for same issue.

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writing you get a swelled head, you know."

more into the character and began to see a lot more of the positive things, you know, his strength, the rather interesting paradox of his greatest weakness being his greatest strength — which is to say, his compassion, which eventually was responsible for destroying everything he loved — I found that a really intriguing concept. So I started getting more and more into the ELRIC series, the first one, particularly as I got more involved in it full-time with Craig. There was a real energy that developed there. With the second series, it was again difficult to get started, particularly in the first ELRIC story. It connected to a lot of the other **Moorcock** series, so it wasn't really self-contained. There was all this metaphysical stuff like dimensions within dimensions, reincarnated heroes and such, and I found that hard to get into, so I had to read the thing a number of times and, in fact, just to lay the groundwork of what was going on in the second series. I was very conscious of wanting to make this an accurate and faithful adaptation of the book. But once it started working, once I got that out of the way and I started getting more into the stories, the stories themselves seem to have gotten better. I've been getting more and more excited with it. The first story, the one that takes the first three issues, is the weakest. Again there's a lot of exposition, a lot of background information, it's difficult. By the second issue, the story really starts picking up considerably, and when I saw what George had given me as a final product I was very excited. That started getting me even more into the character and into the series.

MARK: *Elric seems to be a character not in control of his own destiny. He seems to feel that there is some ultimate destiny waiting for him and he just follows it wherever it takes him . . .*

MICHAEL: Yeah, he's a puppet. He tries to fight to a certain extent, but I think he's pretty much resigned to the fact that there is something bigger than him and he's just a pawn of fate, which is a nice contrast to my own character, Mr. Monster, who firmly believes that his life and destiny are strictly in his own hands.

MARK: *In translating the novel to comics, was there very much that you had to cut out? Were any characters excised or were any particular scenes deleted?*

MICHAEL: We've largely kept very close to the book. There are some small details here and there that we've cut down a little bit. If there's a fight scene and a break followed by another fight scene, we may compress that into a single fight scene to save time. But anything important is there.

MARK: *Going back to the first series, I'm curious about why in issue #2 Dr. Jest was played up so much on the cover and the splash page when he really only appeared briefly at the beginning of the story. I'd hoped and thought that we'd see more of this rather exquisitely vile character.*

MICHAEL: The reason he was played up so prominently was because I really got into the character a lot, so I was able to do a little arm twisting and got Craig to agree to the Dr. Jest cover and the Dr. Jest splash page and the whole thing. Unfortunately, Dr. Jest really isn't in the book all that much, but it gave me a great opportunity to do all the torture devices and dank cells and all this other stuff that's so much fun to draw.

MARK: *Isn't there supposed to be some sort of graphic novel reprint of the first ELRIC series?*

MICHAEL: As a matter of fact, there is. We're going to be reprinting all six issues in a single volume. Craig and I have redrawn sections of the first issue of the first series. In the first issue, we were a little bit cramped for space at certain spots and so we've expanded certain sections in the ballroom sequence, added a few pages. And if you recall, we had some coloring problems with the first and second issues. We were using a different coloring method. We were actually coloring on Xeroxes instead of using the later greyline method that we used. Well, we're re-coloring those first two books entirely, and doing a new cover, so it should be a very nice little package.

MARK: *If, as you say, you were rather cramped for space in the first issue, how do you account for the predominance of full-page panels and illustrations?*

MICHAEL: Okay. I think that was a case of too many cooks in the broth. When we first started doing the series, our editor, **Mike Friedrich**, thought it would be a really good idea to have a lot of full-page illustrations for a really nice open look to the book to attract people, because when you have Craig's artwork and my artwork you want

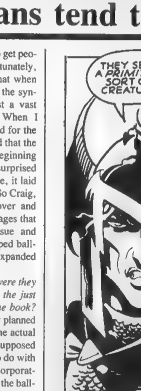
"Fans tend to be fickle."

to give it a display and that helps to get people into the book gradually. Unfortunately, it got carried away to the point that when I finally got a chance to see what the synopsis was all about, we had just a vast predominance of splash pages. When I looked over what had been planned for the issue and I read the book, I noticed that the entire ballroom sequence at the beginning had been cut out, and I was a bit surprised because it was such a pivotal scene, it laid the scene for the rest of the series. So Craig, Mike and Roy and I talked it over and knocked out a few of the pin-up pages that were supposed to be in the issue and replaced these with a rather cramped ballroom scene. That's what we've expanded in the graphic album.

MARK: *The other pin-up pages, were they integrated into the story or were the just something extra for the back of the book?*

MICHAEL: Well, it was originally planned to have a few extra in the back. The actual splash page in the first issue was supposed to be separated and have nothing to do with what was going on there, but I incorporated it, so it became the first panel of the ballroom sequence.

We were all very much trying to learn the ropes. I had never worked with Craig before when I started working on this. It's kind of funny, because when we originally started working on the ELRIC project I had known that Craig had worked with Roy on the first graphic album, so I had assumed that everything was in place and that everyone knew what they were supposed to do and it was going to be this smooth little machine that just added the one element, which would be me. Well, as it turned out there was a whole different method, a chain of command and everything else, and no one really seemed to know at first what to do. Everything was very disorganized. For instance, the coloring method that we used, I had assumed that Craig had done a number of coloring jobs; he had colored the ELRIC graphic album. Well, originally we were given photostats to color and had been really close to the deadline, working real hard. We knew we had to get this thing out real soon because the deadline was creeping up, and it was a cold, miserable day in Kent, Ohio, freezing cold weather, snow up to your ears, and we'd gotten the photostats back from the printer. We started trying to color on these things and the color would not take. Everything would start to look very blotchy and it was like working on photographic paper with some oil on it, you know, it was just kind of strange. You couldn't get a good-looking solid line. I had never worked like this. I had assumed Craig had, but what I found out was that for the ELRIC graphic



album, he had colored the original artwork right on the Bristol board originals, which I couldn't even conceive of doing, because you make one mistake and you're stuck with it. And Craig had never worked with photostats before, so we went down to Jerry's Diner, which is like this little greasy spoon diner, at like three in the morning, and we were just real, real depressed. You don't get more depressed than being in Jerry's Diner at 3 a.m. Eventually, I came up with the idea of getting Xeroxes on good, clean white cardboard. It actually held the colors very nicely, the only problem was that the lines weren't quite as sharp as we would have liked, so it gave a slightly blurry look to the thing, which eventually we managed to alleviate by the third issue using the greyline method.

MARK: *With the second issue, you obviously took a whole different approach as to how you would tell the story...*

MICHAEL: Yeah, we started picking up the pace by the second issue. By that issue, we had knocked a lot of the bugs out and we started doing a lot more of the actual storytelling. It was planned that we'd really get into the story by the second issue, in any case. But I really didn't start feeling good about it until about the third issue.

MARK: *Was there a period of disorientation after Pacific folded?*

MICHAEL: Yeah, actually there was. That was kind of amusing in a not-so-amusing way. We had originally planned to do the second series for Pacific Comics, as the first one had been, and around that time I realized that I was going to be working with **George Freeman** and that there was no longer any need for me to stay in Kent, Ohio. I had moved to Kent specifically to work with Craig on the project, and after two years I discovered that I really didn't like freezing cold winters, so I decided I was going to be moving down to Berkeley where I had lived a few years back. My girlfriend, Janet, and I were both going to be coming down here. Everything is packed away, I've rented out a trailer, filled it absolutely to the brim with everything I possessed (except for my comic book collection which was sent in the mail already — you've never gotten worse looks from a postman in your life, except me with dozens of boxes of heavy comics.) Night before, I call **Mike Friedrich** to tell him I'll be on the road for a week so he won't be able to contact me, and he tells me that Pacific Comics is dead, which is a delightful thing to find out — that you not only have no place to live in this new town, but you no longer have an income. So I was a bit nervous, but fortunately I was just too exhausted from all the packing and everything to get too concerned about it. I was just concerned about driving cross-country. Fortunately, while I was going cross-country, Mike had been on the phone contacting various publishers. ELRIC was considered a fairly hot property and, of course, First Comics wound up getting it, which was a big relief for me and my bank account.

MARK: *You had already completed the first MR. MONSTER story at this time, hadn't you?*

MICHAEL: Yeah, the entire 26-page first story had been finished for some time before that and was planned to be in VANGUARD #7-9, the Pacific Comics anthology title, and the first issue had come out, and the book and company had gone under. As it turned out, it was the very best thing

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"The point of MR. MONSTER is to be schmaltzy."

that could have happened as far as MR. MONSTER goes. Wishing no ill will on the **Schaneses**, but MR. MONSTER was supposed to be just some kind of back-up feature buried in the back of this rather poor-selling anthology title, with a circulation under 19,000 copies. As it turned out, we had offered MR. MONSTER to First Comics at the time as a one-shot comic book. My hope, of course, at that time was that it might do sufficiently well and we might be able to get a series going from that one-shot. First Comics was far more interested in getting ELRIC and saw MR. MONSTER as something of a poor cousin to that, so we took it to Eclipse, who was slightly more enthusiastic. I'm not sure that they thought it was going to be any great shakes either, but they liked the looks of it, they liked **Bill Loeb**'s artwork and they liked my work, so they were willing to give it a chance.

MARK: *And now it's been the big sell-out that no one thought it was going to be.*

MICHAEL: Yeah, it seems to have surprised everybody. Almost everybody.

MARK: *You always knew it would be a hit, or had at least hoped it would?*

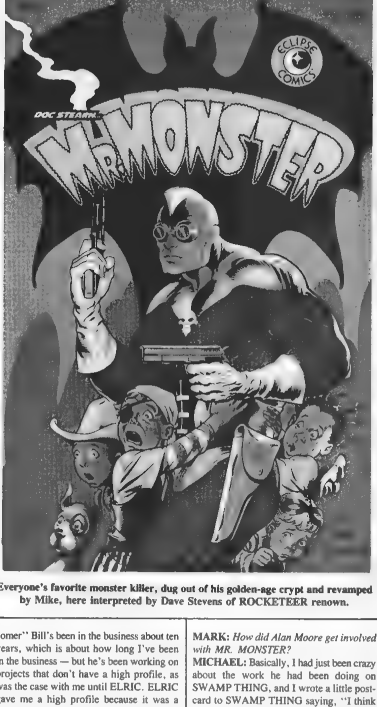
MICHAEL: I had a lot of hopes for MR. MONSTER. I was and am very excited about the character, about the art combination with Bill, and working with **Ken Bruzenak** on the lettering. It's a concept that is just so obvious, so completely obvious, that it's really surprising no one jumped on it years ago with a vengeance, which is basically the concept of having a super-hero who specializes in killing monsters, issue after issue. Everybody loves monsters, everybody loves super-heroes, toss in some humor and you've got something for everybody.

MARK: *Bill Loebs lives in Michigan and Ken Bruzenak lives in Pennsylvania, so you've got to do everything through the mail and over the phone which, again, is very different from the more intimate arrangement you had with Craig. How do you feel about that?*

MICHAEL: I find it kind of exciting to be able to work with people all over the country and still wind up with such unified projects. Neither MR. MONSTER nor ELRIC has the look of a company assembly line. It's everybody trying to work together and it really does come together, but you've got to be working with people that you like and respect and who think along similar lines.

MARK: *The combination of you and Bill Loebs happened through the auspices of Pacific Comics teaming a so-called newcomer (Loebs) with a more established pro (you), which was essentially the policy they had in VANGUARD. Is that correct?*

MICHAEL: Basically, though as a "newcomer" Bill's been in the business about ten years, which is about how long I've been in the business — but he's been working on projects that don't have a high profile, as was the case with me until ELRIC. ELRIC gave me a high profile because it was a good-selling title in full-color. If it's not full-color, your average fan doesn't seem to notice it. Bill and I have had similar artistic directions, we're both heavily influenced by **Will Eisner**, and so our styles had a natural tendency to click together very nicely. It's really a pleasure working with Bill.

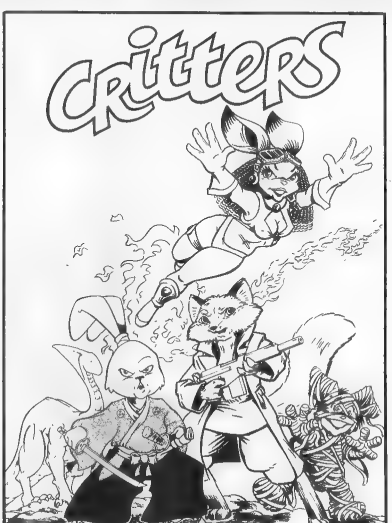


Everyone's favorite monster killer, dug out of his golden-age crypt and revamped by Mike, here interpreted by Dave Stevens of ROCKETEER renown.

MARK: *How did Alan Moore get involved with MR. MONSTER?*

MICHAEL: Basically, I had just been crazy about the work he had been doing on SWAMP THING, and I wrote a little postcard to SWAMP THING saying, "I think this is the best comic going and **Alan Moore** is the best writer going." A few weeks later I got this two or three page typewritten letter from Alan saying how delighted he was to hear from me and saying that he had been an admirer of my work for many years and saying — this is the highest praise I can im-

PICK OF THE LITTER.



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ON SALE IN FEBRUARY FROM FANTAGRAPHICS BOOKS

"We want to do SWAMP THING vs. MR. MONSTER."

agine — that he really loved my writing. So when **Alan Moore** says he likes your writing, you get a swelled head, you know. At that stage of the game, I said, "Well, Al, heh, would you be at all interested in trying your hand at a MR. MONSTER story?" And he said, "Sure," and came up with one of the funniest stories I've seen, period, MR. MONSTER or no.

MARK: *Alan has a real knack for offbeat humor, especially a kind of dry, off-the-cuff humor. Is this story like that?*

MICHAEL: No, there are some dry humor elements, but there's an awful lot of crazy slapstick to it. One of the things Alan said when he sent me the script was that when he was writing this thing it was like a breath of fresh air for him, because with most of his other comic work he's got to really work at being restrained, trying to be understated and subtle and all this other good stuff that you want a story to be. But the whole point of MR. MONSTER is to be as schmaltzy — as overstated — as you can get, so he could just go crazy, which I think is the pleasure I get out of it also.

MARK: *When you found Mr. Monster in this coverless Golden Age comic and decided to revamp him, did you consider investigating the possibility of existing copyrights?*

MICHAEL: No, the original character had only appeared very, very briefly about 40 years ago, so any statute of limitations for copyrights were expired. In addition, I did make some changes in the title and the costume, slight changes but enough that I was able to secure the copyright.

MARK: *Then you have sole rights to Mr. Monster — he's your character?*

MICHAEL: Oh, yeah. I have full rights, copyrights, and I'm also trademarking the title — so, anybody out there, YOU'RE WARNED!

MARK: *Are you at all surprised with how your career has progressed over the last ten years?*

MICHAEL: I'm rather startled at the most recent events. It seems that both the new ELRIC and MR. MONSTER are making a very big splash in the alternative comics press, and as such, I suddenly find myself to be a very hot artist, which certainly is quite a bit different from the majority of my career, when I was known as "Many Others." I'd be in a comic and the ads would have a listing of **John Byrne, Frank Miller**, such and such, and "many others." That was always me. So it's nice to change.

MARK: *How do you feel about suddenly, or finally, being a "hot artist"? How does it feel to have that sort of notoriety, or name recognition? Is your telephone ringing more often?*

MICHAEL: Yes. Again, I have mixed feelings about it. On the one hand, I love it, you know. I've worked hard for quite a few years to get to this stage. On the other hand, I'm very conscious of the fact that it's still early in the game, and whatever wreathes and laurels and accolades can be thrown at me right now, it can be taken away just as quickly tomorrow. I've seen how idolized someone like **Frank Miller** was, and as soon as he did something that the fans didn't like or he didn't come out frequently enough, he was just completely forgotten. I mean, not *completely* forgotten and certainly when he comes back again he'll be just as popular as ever, but the fans tend to be fickle and I don't want to take anything for granted at this stage of the game.

MARK: *It seems, though, that comics artists tend to get a greater degree of personal recognition than artists in other fields. With comics, the art is the thing, whereas in other fields, the art is only a part of the package that something else — like a book or a record or a movie — comes in. How do you feel about that?*

MICHAEL: Being an incredible egotist, I love it but, of course, everything is relative. We get a certain amount of notoriety, but compared to a TV star or a movie star, you know, you can walk down the street and no one is going to say, "Ooh, there's Michael T. Gilbert, creator of Mr. Monster!" No, they're going to say, "Uh, spare change, bud?"

MARK: *How do you feel, then, working in a field that the vast majority of the general public has no interest in or respect for?*

MICHAEL: Well, I don't dwell on that too much, for one thing. It really doesn't disturb me. It might have been a different situation 20 years ago. I think things have improved quite a bit since then. There are still some intelligent fans out there who really do care about the work. For myself, I feel that it's the one thing in the world I can do better than anything else I can do. It gives me the chance to use my writing abilities, my art abilities, my coloring abilities, lettering abilities, everything. I can't think of anything else that would afford me the same freedom, short of motion pictures, and for that you need a huge budget and 50 million people helping you. I find comics very, very satisfying for me, and the books I'm working on I'm very proud of. I'm not doing MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE #2000. I'm doing things that I'm genuinely proud of, which I can show to my parents or to my acquaintances, and they can look at it and say, "Wow, look at the work that goes into that."

MARK: *Can you look into the foreseeable future, years from now, and see yourself still doing comics?*

MICHAEL: Sure. There are a lot of people who look at comics as a stepping stone to something better, going to movies or TV or fine art or whatever. I've always just wanted to be a comic-book artist. I think that, in and of itself, is a really worthwhile craft. I would like to continue as long as I can continue doing decent work.

MARK: *Of the current crop of comics, you mentioned SWAMP THING as one of your*

Slop Thing? Alan Moore tries his hand at scripting Michael's MR. MONSTER.

© 1985 Moore, Gilbert & Locke

"As soon as Frank Miller did something

favorites. What else are you currently excited by?

MICHAEL: Oh, there are a number of good books out there. LOVE AND ROCKETS I really enjoy quite a bit. Really excellent work in there. NEXUS, DALGODA, AMBUSH BUG. JOURNEY, of course — I like Bill's work.ZOT!was a real good book, real sleeper. I've enjoyed Craig's NIGHT MUSIC series.

By the way, speaking of SWAMP THING — **Alan Moore** and I have had some serious discussions about the possibilities of a SWAMP THING/MR. MONSTER crossover. It's such a natural pairing — the greatest monster-killing super-hero duking it out with the greatest "super-hero" monster — that it's really hard to resist. Bill and Ken are for it, and **Steve Bissette** and **John Totleben** are really hot to do it, as well as SWAMP THING'S editor, **Karen Berger**, and Eclipse's head honchos, Cat and Dean. The one stumbling block at this stage seems to be trying to convince DC's vice president, **Paul Levitz**, that the fans would enjoy the crossover, and that a shot of new blood (so to speak) would be very advantageous to DC, as well as Eclipse. I'm hoping the fans of both MR. MONSTER and SWAMP THING — and retailers in particular — will write to DC and let them know that they'd like to see the MR. MONSTER/SWAMP THING crossover

MARK: *What do you think of the inability many fans seem to have to respond to comics that aren't super-powered?*

MICHAEL: I think it's real unfortunate. It cuts off a lot of enjoyment to them, and it cuts off a lot of opportunity for expresion for some artists who have something to say in a different way. Back in the 1950s, you could find some really excellent, excellent comic books in different genres that don't even exist today. The **Simon & Kirby** love comics. The **Simon & Kirby** western comics like BULLSEYE and BOY'S RANCH, excellent things. Crime comics. And this sort of thing you really almost have to sneak in on the fan nowadays. If they don't see Super Blubber-Man fighting someone, they'll feel, "Well, I shouldn't be reading this. It doesn't go in my collection properly."

MARK: *I don't want to name any names, but there's a certain comics writer who is new to the field and he's good and a little bit different, but when he looks at LOVE AND ROCKETS he essentially rejects it rather offhandedly as not being comics. He sees it as nothing but talking heads or something. Personally, I find it difficult to fathom how someone who appreciates comics and who doesn't necessarily write your average super-hero comic can't see the natural appeal of something like LOVE AND ROCKETS.*

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the fans didn't like he was forgotten."

MICHAEL: Well, it shows a real blind spot in that writer's viewpoint. Obviously, he seems to be thinking that good comics are visual pyrotechnics, when some of the emotional and dramatic struggles can be just as exciting or more so.

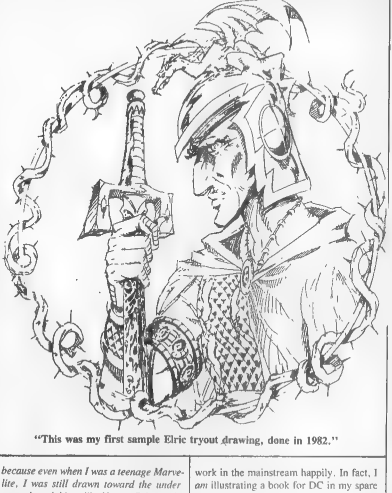
MARK: *I was reading your STRANGE BREW collection and when I got to the pages you did with Harvey Pekar, though I'd already read them in AMERICAN SPLENDOR, I was struck by how different they were in contrast to the surrounding fantasy material. The served more as reflections of real life, which made them more genuine and interesting. And I can go back and read those stories over and over and over, whereas I wouldn't be inclined to read a BATMAN story over and over. The same is true of your various "Diary" episodes published in DOPE COMIX, DR. WIRTHAM'S COMIX & STORIES, and elsewhere. I'm drawn toward the recognizable real life element, which many people will say has no place in comics.*

MICHAEL: It's absurd to say that there's anything that has no place in comics. You can have any number of subject matters on TV, in movies, and in books, and you can certainly have just as great a variety of subject matter and approaches in comics. There's absolutely no reason in the world to say that "this" can't be done.

MARK: *I really enjoyed Will Elsner's "A Life Force," and it's just so obvious that comics are perfect for that sort of story. Just telling these human stories, and it can just go on forever, really. I mean, if you want to talk about continued stories, these kinds of stories can go on indefinitely.*

MICHAEL: Sure, that's one of the advantages of comics compared to some of the other media as far as these personal stories are concerned. Comics *are* a very intimate medium. You can hold it in your hands, you can go at your own pace, you can re-read a section. You can't do that in a movie; you're pulled along. But it really does become a very intimate experience. There are certain slice-of-life stories that do appear periodically. I've seen a few things that **Bob Crumb** has done, you know, for WEIRDO and some of the most recent **ZAP COMIX**, where he does these biographical things on blues musicians, and I think he did something on **James Boswell** fairly recently. But **Crumb** is just excellent at that stuff. He gives a real time and place from different centuries. It gives a feeling that time passed, and again, it's this very close, you-and-the-comic experience. And most of the younger Marvel readers wouldn't even want to look at that, which is unfortunate.

MARK: *Yeah, and I really can't fathom that because even when I was a teenage Marvelite, I was still drawn toward the undergrounds and things like Harvey Pekar is doing, though he wasn't doing it then, but stories about real people you could recognize as such.*



"This was my first sample Elric tryout drawing, done in 1982."

MICHAEL: Sure. **Bob Crumb** used to do an awful lot of that. He'd do these exaggerated versions of himself, but they were fascinating. You know, what makes the **Pekar** stuff interesting is that you feel like you're looking through somebody's keyhole. I guess it's the voyeur in you that really gets pulled out.

MARK: *Can you ever see yourself doing a typical mainstream comic book?*

MICHAEL: Well, I can see myself doing a typical mainstream comic book if I needed the money and that was the only way I could get it, yes, and I would try to get whatever pleasure I could out of that — you know, try to do just about the best work I can. I can see myself *enjoying* it if I had the freedom to do it my way, had a stake in sales percentages and such, and could write it as well as draw it. Depending on the extent of freedom I had to tell my story, yes, I could work in the mainstream happily. In fact, I *am* illustrating a book for DC in my spare time — a one-shot "Origin of the Spectre" for DC's upcoming SECRET ORIGINS series. And I am enjoying it.

MARK: *When I first saw your work in the mid-'70s, and even looking at your SPIRIT JAM pages (framed on the wall), your style just doesn't fit into that accepted mainstream look. But I think that comics, while not changing a whole lot, are changing enough so that they can accommodate artists like yourself who have different and unusual styles.*

MICHAEL: Certainly a lot more so. A few years ago, and to a certain extent even today, you're being told by the mainstream, "Do it like **John Buscema**, do it like **Jack Kirby**, do it like whoever is hot this week" but there has been this competition from the alternatives and there are a lot more opportunities to get away with a lot more. Some of the stuff that **Sienkiewicz** was doing on THE NEW MUTANTS and such I don't think you would have been allowed to do five or ten years ago.

MARK: *It looks, though, like ELRIC and*

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MR. MONSTER will be keeping you pretty busy.

MICHAEL: Yes, but ideally I would like to be able to expand on MR. MONSTER and really focus the vast majority of energies on that. I feel that there are a lot of people who can do a good ELRIC, but there are very few people who can do what I do with MR. MONSTER.

MARK: *ELRIC and MR. MONSTER seem to afford you a certain creative balance between drama and humor.*

MICHAEL: It works quite well, in fact. Part of the reason MR. MONSTER came about was sort of a backlash against the rather somber ELRIC series I was working on for over a year. All that spontaneous fun and overstatement that I couldn't use in ELRIC, I'm able to put into MR. MONSTER. I have to be very understated with ELRIC, and the point of MR. MONSTER is to be as overstated as possible. It is a nice balance.

MARK: *Will Bill Loebs be with you for the duration?*

MICHAEL: Yes. As I say, I love Bill's work; there are a few little rough edges here and there that we're still in the process of ironing out — you know, certain facial features, certain this or that — but on the whole, he adds an awful lot to the strip. He's an excellent inker and he gets a lot of mood and atmosphere that I think is just ideal for the strip.

MARK: *Has anyone thought of inviting Will Eisner to do a cover or something?*

MICHAEL: I would love it, but I'd certainly be very reluctant to ask him because I know he doesn't like doing anything besides THE SPIRIT and his own projects. He made an exception with that Superman picture for SUPERMAN #400, and I understand he's made an exception with the CEREBUS JAM.

MARK: *Maybe he'd be flattered enough to make a third exception, considering how both you and Loebs have been so influenced by his work.*

MICHAEL: If we can get him drunk one night, maybe we'll see if we can talk him into it. . .

© 1983 Thomas, Russell, Gilbert/© 1972 Moorcock

"I'm the 'oldest' assistant editor."

THEN

NOW

"I do anything Mike Carlin is not doing."

MIKE HIGGINS

First, for those of you wondering if I can resist — no, Mike Higgins is not an heir to the vast Higgins Ink fortune. His lot in life has been to help enrich that company, not siphon its wealth. Mike Higgins is a letterer.

He is also Mike Carlin's assistant editor, which means that Mike gets to see all that John Byrne art in the original — before it has been inked. He also gets to listen in and contribute to plans for the other titles that he helps edit at Marvel Comics.

Mike started at Marvel the same year I did, 1977, in the same department, production. I was doing freelance mechanicals and Mike was on staff doing corrections and everything else that crossed his drawing board. He was long-haired, bohemian and a Deadhead.

Nowadays, his hair is not as long, but he is still bohemian, still a Deadhead — and is also a damned good letterer and a pretty sharp assistant editor, to boot...

DWIGHT JON ZIMMERMAN: *Okay, we're talking with Michael Higgins — assistant editor at Marvel and Marvel's resident Deadhead. I first met Mike about 1977 or 1978, when I doing some freelance production for Marvel, and Mike was — you were on staff as a letterer.*

MIKE HIGGINS: Yeah, the first job I had at Marvel, aside from a few short freelance lettering jobs, was as staff lettering corrector. That's a job where you're not hired to think much, just to perform various functions. Things are scribbled around the borders of the pages by the editors — like change "Behinder" to "Beyonder" — anything like that — changing pointers that go to the wrong characters — a follow-the-leader type of job.

DWIGHT: *I met quite a few people during that first year, and I would associate people with either events or certain things. The first way I got your name and face registered in synch was that you were George Perez' friend.*

MIKE: Right. I actually met you before either of us were on staff — when George was working on the BEATLES book. I was supplying some of the reference material. That job was inked by a lot of newcomers

"It took forever to get that first job."

— one of whom was **John Byrne.** I think we stopped over at **Dave Kraft's** apartment, where you were doing some of the research. That's when we first met. At that time my only real connection to comics was **George Perez,** on a professional basis. Anybody else I eventually met in comics was really because I was standing next to George at sometime or another. I had run into George at the very beginning of his comic career. He had not been published yet by Marvel but he had just sold his first job. George was breaking in, as I mentioned. I met him right at the very beginning. He was at a comics convention. He was very friendly, very open to the fans. Probably because he was so new and so young, and he was real excited about comics. He wasn't an old man who had forgotten what comics were. He was into it, excited about what he was doing, excited that he was going to be drawing comics, and you could feel it. Nearby, there was a whole room filled with **Neal Adamses** and **Frank Brunners.** But George was the one who seemed most interesting — his aura, or something. I didn't see him again for almost a year after that, but then I ran into him again at another convention. I was surprised that he would remember me, but then, having seen him again, we basically became friends, and were pretty close for a few years there. When I was getting out of high school he suggested that, since he needed a letterer for some outside projects, I should do some lettering samples. I didn't know *anything* about lettering, I didn't even know what you *used* to do it. I had certainly read comics, there was lettering in there, but I didn't know about it.

Bill Mantlo was the one who suggested I find out what an Ames guide was. It is used to rule lettering. His wife was a letterer. I used to measure out the lines with a ruler — I didn't know what I was doing. I did a couple of samples for George and he told me, "Watch this, watch that, do better balloons, make the 'o' a little bigger, and right away." Then I went to a party at his house — and there was my first influx of comic people. I met **Jim Shooter, Dave Kraft, Roger Stern** and I don't know who else, all on the same day. **Ralph Macchio** didn't show. **Jim Shooter** suggested I come to Marvel. I had no intentions of approaching Marvel for years about anything. I thought, "Oh, some day." But Jim said, "Go up, see **Danny Crespi,** he'll tell you what pens to use . . ." Sort of by accident I became a letterer. I started getting some freelance work on five-page inventory stories Marvel was doing at that time, but there wasn't really a hell of a lot of that

An early sample of Mike's lettering, from a rare comics story written by Don and Maggie Thompson, better known today as editors of the COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE.

WORLDS ENOUGH
"HAD I BUT WORLDS ENOUGH, AND TIME"
HARRY PITTER WAS VERY SHORT ON TIME. EACH TIME HE WINKED INTO ANOTHER DIMENSION, HIS HOPES WERE HIGH. SOMETIMES HE CAME CLOSE AND THE DISAPPOINTMENT WAS STRONGER.
THIS TIME, HE WASN'T EVEN CLOSE.
THERE COULD BE ONLY ONE PLACE THAT WAS RIGHT FOR HARRY-- AND THIS WAS DEFINITELY NOT IT!
HARRY WASN'T LOOKING FOR THE BEST OF ALL POSSIBLE WORLDS. HE WAS JUST LOOKING FOR HIS OWN WORLD! AND FINDING THAT ONE JUST-RIGHT WORLD IN AN INFINITY OF WRONG WORLDS JUST MIGHT BE THE DEATH OF HARRY.
ADOLF 1998
SCRIPT BY DON & MAGGIE THOMPSON FROM A PUBLISHED STORY BY DON THOMPSON
ART BY LEE ELIAS
EMBELLISHMENTS BY GEORGE ROUSOS
LETTERED BY MICHAEL HIGGINS

© 1990 Marvel Comics Group

"Verbose copy . . . is aggravating."

work going around. Then **Jim Novak** left staff and I was almost able to letter by that time. It's more or less a training job. to be doing lettering corrections. The spot was open, **Annette Kawecki** filled it for a short time. Eventually, I guess because they couldn't find anyone else who would take the job, they said, "Hey, do you want the job?"

DWIGHT: *You were at the right place at the right time.*

MIKE: Yeah, so in a few months I was on staff, working 9-to-5 in the production department, doing corrections, changing spelling, switching pointers — you know, "Move this panel here, cut this out, get this done!" But it's a type of a job where you learn a hell of a lot about comics. Sometimes you're tearing pages apart and putting them back together. It was really a good place to begin. It gave me a lot of background information that I would never have if I began in an editorial job or started as a writer or artist.

DWIGHT: *I agree — for the brief period that I was there on staff. The whole mechanical process of seeing it, watching the creative end, and then following it through to the mechanicals was fascinating.*

MIKE: Right. 'Cause I had seen books from the creative end before, by hanging out with George. I had seen him drawing pages, and I'd been there for plots with writers — but I had more of a fan outside idea. I didn't really know what happened from that point on. I knew someone drew these things, someone wrote them.

DWIGHT: *And magically they appeared.*

MIKE: Yeah, suddenly there they were on the newsstands. There's an awful lot to be discovered that doesn't just show up in print.

DWIGHT: *I remember one of your first lettering jobs, your full-story things George Roussos was the artist, it was black-and-white.*

MIKE: You're right! I forgot all about that. Actually, it was a **Lee Elias** job, done in tones and **Geroge Roussos** was sort of re-inking it. It was shot down to print-size already, and they needed someone who could letter that small. I had been getting some criticism that I was lettering too small for the reproduciton size.

DWIGHT: *Smaller than Joe Rosen?*

MIKE: Yeah! Because people had been telling me to — like George, **Jo Duffy**, and **Dave Kraft** — the people who were encouraging to me at the very beginning. They encouraged me to keep lettering smaller and smaller and smaller as long as it was clear. But, there's a point where the reproduction quality has to be taken into account. I was suddenly lettering too small and I had to start going larger again. They knew that I had that sort of problem of lettering too small and they gave me this art job at the same size and told

NEW YORK, N.Y. 9:17 AM.
LOOK, JOHN, I KNOW YOU'RE REAL BUSY, BUT THE NEXT ISSUE OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR IS ALMOST TERMINALLY LATE. NOW, NEITHER OF US WANT TO PRODUCE AN FF ISSUE THAT'S STAN LEE PRESENTS TWENTY-TWO BLANK PAGES AND SOME ADS.
WELL, WE'VE GOTTA DO SOMETHING, JOHN I'VE GOT JIM NOVAK STANDING BY, READY TO LETTER IT. GLYNIS WEIN ALL READY TO COLOR IT. WHAT DO I TELL THEM?
BUT I DON'T REALLY SEE ANY ALTERNATIVE, JOHN. DO YOU? JIM SHOOTER LEFT ME IN CHARGE OF THE FF'S BOOK. I DON'T WANT MY OFFICIAL CREDIT TO BE MIKE HIGGINS, REPRINT EDITOR.
IN
OUT
FINE - - TWENTY-FOUR HOURS. BUT DON'T FAIL ME, JOHN. YOU'VE NEVER MISSED A DEADLINE YET - - BUT THIS IS REAL CLOSE!

Mike chews out the hand that drew him in FANTASTIC FOUR 262. For the other side of this conversation, see our rap with John Byrne in issue 25.

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"Anyone who's a letterer got there by mistake."

© 1979 Marvel Comics Ltd

Wolverine teaches Hercules some table manners, from a British Marvel weekly. This story introduced letterer Mike Higgins along with a brand new inker by the name of George Perez.

me to letter it. There are certainly better ways the job could have been done, but at that point I was anxious to letter a complete story, so it was almost a thrill event to be doing this monster story. It wasn't long after that that I started getting the lower caliber books, like MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE, to letter. It seemed to me like it took forever to get that first job, but when I look back on it, it wasn't really so long. I'm surprised I was even working here by that time — I was only eighteen. Really, I just accidently ended up working here.

DWIGHT: *Yeah, a lot of people — well, some — get in through deliberate attempt.*

MIKE: I *would* have made a deliberate attempt — but certainly not then. I expected to be learning how to draw better for three or four years. I don't think there are many people who aspire to be letterers, so I'm sure that just about anyone who is a letterer got there by mistake.

DWIGHT: *You mentioned that Danny gave you a lot of pointers on lettering.*

MIKE: Right. **Danny Crespi** was someone who people would know — but, back then, he was a real behind-the-scenes guy. He was a great letterer. You'd never see his name in a lettering credit, but he lettered billions of covers, probably *thirty* years ago he was lettering stories for Marvel — THE BLACK KNIGHT, I know he did.

DWIGHT: *What are the mechanics of lettering?*

MIKE: Ah, what does a letterer do?

DWIGHT: *Yeah, exactly.*

MIKE: Okay. A letterer is given the original penciled art, a typed script, and usually, a Xerox with balloon placement, just to show us where the balloons should be, who the pointer goes to and if there's a caption or a sound effect or whatever. So you have all these pieces of paper and your job is to translate it all onto the original. You use a T-square and a mechanical pencil with the Ames guide for the lines and copy the script. You're not supposed to be editing the script as you go.

When I first started, they joked about would-be letterer/editors and things like that, which seems a little strange to me at this point, but I guess letterers aren't supposed to be editors.

DWIGHT: *What do you letter with?*

MIKE: I use a strange kind of pen, which is a hawk quill. I cut off the tip and sand it down.

DWIGHT: *Is it a stiff or a flexible point?*

MIKE: Stiff. I said hawk quill because crow — I never made this distinction until people corrected me a tr. usand times — crow quills are more flexible. The hawk quill is not flexible, it's more stiff. But that's what I letter with, and then I basically use a B-6 or a B-5½ Speedball point for bold. But a lot of people use Speedball points for the regular lettering, too. I don't have as much control over them. I can't get as straight a line, or as consistent an ink flow.

Lettering corrections on staff, you have to get different points to match different letterers. **John Costanza's** lettering is not **Joe Rosen's** is not **Tom Orzechowski's**, so you need different pens to imitate other styles. **Novak** suggested the hawk quill for **Joe Rosen** corrections and I started using it. Eventually, I found that it was the point I was most comfortable with, but that should make some sense because I was lettering close to that size.

DWIGHT: *You were a small letterer. And so it's not so unusual.*

MIKE: I've also introduced that point to several other letterers, like **John Morelli**. He was my replacement when I finally was leaving staff as lettering corrector. In fact, I worked on a point for him, and he said he used it for months after I started my "leave-of-absence" stage. I guess lots of people use them.

DWIGHT: *As a letterer, what's been your most aggravating experience? Is it trying to fit too much copy into too small a space?*

MIKE: That can be a problem.

DWIGHT: *Verbose writers?*

MIKE: Verbose writers — maybe that would

"Yes — I set a page on fire once, too!"

be — well, no, fitting copy into a small space isn't that bad. Having worked in production, I can usually come up with something. I can think of a way to make something fit in there, even if it means rearranging the panel or reducing it or flopping it. But verbose copy that doesn't say anything important is aggravating. I guess that's just bad writing. I don't mind lettering a book that has a lot of copy, if the copy serves a purpose. I don't mind a joke that could be left out being in there as long as it's funny. I'm lettering a story right now which I think has a lot of copy, but I don't mind doing it because I feel that the copy means something in this job. You know, thirty balloons on a page, or something, but they're carefully thought out. There's not a wasted period in this job. It's really good. I've probably done some wasted periods or maybe an extra adjective in my life.

DWIGHT: *Do you find that your prior work as a letterer has helped you now that you're an assistant editor?*

MIKE: Well, yes, in certain terms. People sometimes come up to me and say, "How can I place copy on this panel?" And, I can tell letterers what I don't like about their lettering, and actually be able to get something like a result, which I think is pretty hard to do. I don't think a lot of editors really know a lot about lettering. They can read it, but they haven't really analyzed it much.

DWIGHT: *In general terms, they can say it's too big, or too small.*

MIKE: Yeah, right, but I can pick out things that other people wouldn't see. My having done lettering has come in handy. But just in terms of the production angle — being on staff in the production department — that certainly opened up much more. Like I said, books were literally torn apart and put back together.

DWIGHT: *I remember seeing some of those.*

MIKE: Several times I've had editors tell me things like, "I don't understand how you're going to do this, but do the best you can. This is what has to be done, think of something and try to get this to be, you know, in triangular form instead of the rectangular form we're giving you."

DWIGHT: *"And by the way, it has to be all done in five minutes."* (Laughter.)

MIKE: That's another thing about production — you have to be a speed demon. You can make a living at being letterer and be slow at it, but you can't work in production and be slow at it, because everything has to be done immediately. All the books are always leaving now! "Can you just do this to it?" Re-letter the whole page, paste it up, have it redrawn — so many things are done that people just have no concept of. Behind the scenes at comics. Jigsaw puzzles. Occasionally even one of those becomes a challenge. "How do we get this to work?" And I guess, occasionally, we blow it — where a book doesn't actually leave because there's too much that really has to be done. But I think we're pretty good with that kind of stuff.

DWIGHT: *Did you ever spill any ink on pages?*

MIKE: Yes! I only spilled ink on two pages, ever. I set one on fire once, too, when I used to smoke — rubber cement and all!

When I spilled ink on pages, I just got an electric eraser and got rid of it. It was a **Jim Shooter/John Buscema** HULK story that appeared in the color magazine. I was lettering something like my twentieth page and you get a little careless. I had pages all over the floor, but when I knocked over the bottle of ink, it only hit two of them. The next day, I electric erased them. Then I got Xeroxes of the pencils and redrew it back in so it wasn't really bad. Most people wouldn't have been able to do that. When I handed the pages in, the editors never even knew I did it, because it was repaired by the time they saw it.

DWIGHT: *You've also had a little bit of art training as well?*

MIKE: No real training, but I have some sort of limited artistic ability. I've re-drawn pages here and there over the years — certainly a panel here or there, but I've never actually drawn a page from scratch. I have drawn pages combining elements of other pages, and things like that, but I've never drawn a story.

There are certain books where **Mark Gruenwald** and I used to do a lot of heavy tampering with the artwork. Some books aren't as good as others and — let's just say some of the last books **Roy Thomas** edited for Marvel were done with everybody's eyes closed. Mark and I could match certain styles very easily

DWIGHT: *You're now an assistant editor of no books.* (Laughter.)

MIKE: Right. Well, for awhile, it did seem that way. I'm still doing FANTASTIC FOUR and CAPTAIN AMERICA — we saved that one — but, yeah, a lot of the books from this office were cancelled. But, we

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"If Ralph can get to be an editor, so can I!"

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EXTRA--THE X-MEN'S WOLVERINE VS. HERCULES!
HIS NAME IS WOLVERINE, LOGAN TO HIS FRIENDS. RIGHT NOW, AS FAR AS HE'S CONCERNED, HE WASN'T GOT ANY.
I'M TELLING YOU, SIBYL, I'VE BEEN WATCHING THAT GUY, AND HE LOOKS LIKE TROUBLE. I DON'T THINK HE'S INTERESTED.
OH, NO? JUST WATCH ME.
MAN, THIS PLACE IS DEAD. I'D HAVE HAD MORE LAUGHS IN WESTCHESTER.
'CEPT THAT IF I'D STUCK AROUND, I'D PROBABLY A HAD IT OUT WITH CYCLOPS. WE'RE GONNA TANGLE, AND SOON IT'S BAD ENOUGH THAT A WHIMP LIKE HIM IS MAKING TIME WITH JEANNIE, A WOMAN WHO OUGHTTA BE MINE, WITHOUT HAVING TO PUT UP WITH HIM AS LEADER, TOO
MAN, HE MAKES ME SICK WITH ALL THAT KISSING UP TO THE PROFESSOR STUFFIN' TA MAKE US BE GOOD LITTLE X-MEN... MAYBE I SHOULD'A STAYED AN' SHOWED 'EM ALL WHAT A REAL MAN IS.

"The first story I lettered for Marvel."

picked up TRANSFORMERS, THUNDERCATS and X-FACTOR. So it's a transition.

DWIGHT: *When did you become an assistant editor?*

MIKE: The day that I found out I was an assistant editor was December 8th, 1982. I remember that date for certain reasons. So it's a little more than two and a half years. Suddenly I turn around and I say, my god, I've been here for years! I had left the staff lettering position and basically did some freelance work for a couple of years and then it was back on staff after that. Altogether I've been around here for about eight years, but only five of those years have been on staff.

DWIGHT: *Only?*

MIKE: Well, you know, I'm starting to realize how many people tell me how long I've been here.

DWIGHT: *It's strange. I left in 1978, and when I came back in 1982, I went around and I said, "Gosh, there are a lot of people here I don't recognize any more."*

MIKE: When I came back the staff hardly resembled the one I left. I mean, there are certainly familiar faces, but there's a lot of turnover. Since I've been here, again, I'm the "oldest" assistant editor — at two and a half years. Every other assistant has either been promoted or quit in that much time — about seven of them — no, more. Some editors have had a few assistants in that much time. It doesn't seem to me that it was like that before. People were assistants for years.

DWIGHT: *Well, there was a smaller staff.*

MIKE: You're right. It has expanded a lot. But for me to be an assistant editor the longest amount of time seems really strange. I don't think there are any other assistants who've been here more than a year.

DWIGHT: *That's right. The only other one was Owsley, and he's —*

MIKE: He's recently been promoted to editor of SPIDER-MAN. So, maybe someday I'll get to be an editor.

DWIGHT: *Ralph Macchio finally made it.*

MIKE: Really! If Ralph can do it, so can I!

DWIGHT: *You worked for Gruenwald, didn't you? Who was your first editor?*

MIKE: **Bob Budiansky** was my first editor.

DWIGHT: *Do you want to talk about that period?*

MIKE: Why not? I think Bob is a fairly competent artist and this is a business of opinions. My opinions may or may not be someone else's, but when people around here express opinions, they're professional opinions. We all agree and disagree and sometimes scream at each other, but we'll all go out to lunch or dinner and we don't hate each other.

Bob and I worked okay. He has definite ideas of what he wants — freelancers also have very definite ideas about what they want to do and sometimes *everybody's* ideas don't work well together. But, what is an editor if he can't try to get the type of work he wants from a creator? He's not only there to sign vouchers — he's involved in his books. Often, Bob would ask for changes and things. I would either agree with what he was doing or disagree.

People don't always react well when you ask them to change something they've worked on — but you have to know where to draw the line. Sometimes people will grudgingly make changes only to discover that the changes really did work. Naturally, if you're dealing with a person who's proven himself, who's got ten years with the company, you can take a few more chances, bend the rules a bit. Even at that, you don't let people do just anything.

DWIGHT: *It's one thing if you're a neophyte starting out.*

MIKE: Even there — I can think of a brand new writer and artist we tried to work with. Both were, in my opinion, rank amateurs, yet they were already arrogant and unbending — prima donnas.

The "writer" would have been more suited

"When people around here express

to Twinkee ads and he had no understanding of our characters or how to construct a story, but he viewed his lack of ability as *our* problem and he stormed out of the office telling us why we were making a big mistake. Haven't seen much of his work from the competition, either!

The "penciller" had maybe done an ad or two for some game and could *almost* draw, but he had no idea how to break down a story — make me know what's going on by looking at the pictures. They might draw nice pictures, but, like this guy — they can't be bothered with. . .

DWIGHT: *With storytelling?*

MIKE: Right. This guy told us that he could get enough work elsewhere that he didn't need us. So now, I hope he never needs us, because that type of attitude you can keep. And that's a new person — a new person not willing to even compromise.

DWIGHT: *What is your duty as an assistant editor?*

MIKE: An assistant editor works directly for an editor, so every assistant job can be broken down differently. In my case, I do anything that **Mike Carlin** is not doing. I will read plots. I will proofread scripts, I will have covers colored. We don't have it broken down like some editors — y'know, "You take care of this, I'll take care of that." Usually we get two copies of everything, we both go over whatever it is and we trade back and forth.

DWIGHT: *If you read a plot yourself, and you see what might be a trouble spot, do you mark it?*

MIKE: Oh yeah! Then Mike and I talk it over and he either takes my advice or doesn't, depending on how strongly we agree or disagree. I think it's important to work out problems in the early stages of the books. It's my point of view that by the time a book is drawn, the writing should more or less adapt to the art unless the artist did something really absurd. You can basically write around most artists, I think, so there's a little bit less hassling by that stage. I think the hardest part of the work is definitely in the early stages of the story. Even though we do have to come up with the right inkers and all that, particularly in a case like ROM, where one of the things we wanted was lots of different people inking it.

DWIGHT: *When I did that article with you guys on ROM, for MARVEL AGE, one of the exciting things was juggling all the different inkers who wanted to come in and ink Steve Ditko.*

MIKE: Off the top of my head, I can probably think of eight different inkers on ten issues, or something like that. To me, that's fun. ROM is a book that I really enjoyed working on — while it lasted. Really, 'cause **Steve Ditko** is someone whose work I've always admired. He is a legend, and I've found him to be a very pleasant guy —

DWIGHT: *Who does not want to be interviewed.*

MIKE: No, he doesn't. He's not interested in being a star. He's interested in being an artist, which I can respect.

DWIGHT: *What is his impression — the stardom has come to him, regardless?*

MIKE: Yeah, certainly.

DWIGHT: *How does he feel about that?*

MIKE: We're not stars, not celebrities. There is a new breed of creators looking for more celebrity, but going to conventions isn't **Ditko**, although I'm sure he's been to a comic convention.

DWIGHT: *No one would recognize him.*

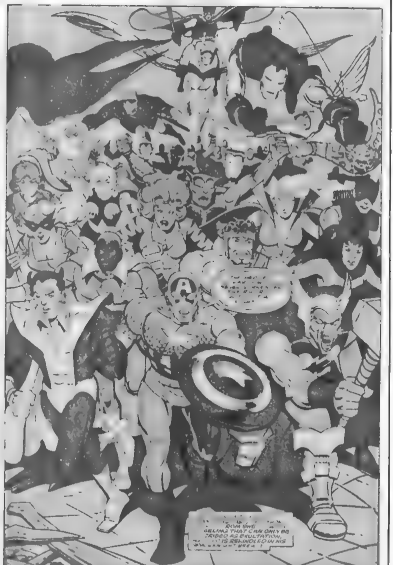
MIKE: I met Steve, or saw Steve for the first time, up at Marvel maybe six or seven years ago. I just walked past him — didn't have any idea who he was. Then **Marie Severin** told me. She says, "Do you want to meet him?" I said "S-S-Sure!" Otherwise, for all I knew, he could have been repairing the Xerox machine.

DWIGHT: *Talking about one of the more celebrity writer/artists, how about John Byrne?*

MIKE: Yeah, **John Byrne.** He definitely is one of the super-stars of the business.

DWIGHT: *What's it like working with him?*

The housecleaning crew arrives. Mike's letters over Steve Ditko/Craig Russel art, from ROM #65.



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opinions, they're professional opinions."

MIKE: Because he's writing, drawing and sometimes inking?

DWIGHT: *And lettering, too.*

MIKE: It *has* happened. When I first started on the FANTASTIC FOUR, we got the book complete — without lettering. The artwork was inked — only the lettering was indicated in pencil on the original artwork. We basically edited the script. We would talk to John very briefly about the story before we saw it. We *almost* knew what was going to be happening, in general terms. Now **Byrne**'s working in more or less the normal Marvel fashion. It's much easier with John in New York.

DWIGHT: *Right. Before he was living in Canada.*

MIKE: That was before I became the assistant. I started with Chicago. Anyway, now we talk to him about the plot, and he delivers each issue in pencil form. Occasionally, it's just breakdowns with the copy on the originals in pencil. Then, he's finished with the job.

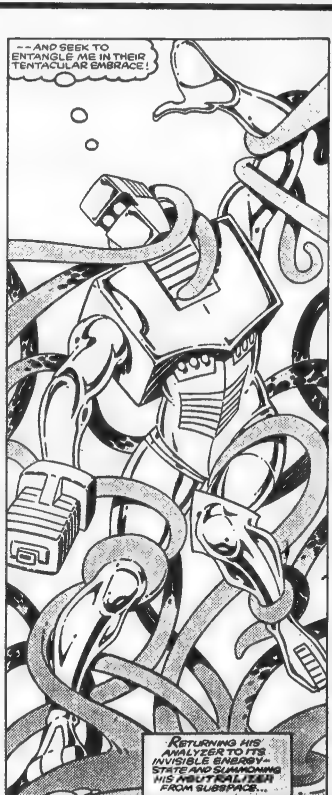
I'm very happy to say we've been getting some really sharp inking on the FANTASTIC FOUR. I think the book looks the best it's looked in years. **Jerry Ordway** is a very talented artist, who can pencil himself, so that was a real advantage. He could take the pencils and interpret them, not just trace them. **Ordway**'s stuff looks great. I don't think **Byrne** was ever inked that well before, by anybody. And that includes everybody, because everybody has inked him. I kind of feel that **Ordway** has a slight edge over Austin, because he's a more organic and **Terry Austin**'s a little too technical for me. **Ordway** has more life in his line. He can catch the subtlety that **Austin** would miss.

DWIGHT: *Because he is a penciller as well?*

MIKE: Yeah. Exactly. I think it's because he's a better penciller than **Terry Austin**, and that's why his inking is just slightly better on John. I don't think it's like night and day, but I think that **Ordway** does have a slight edge over Terry, even though at one point I was jumping up and down — "Let's try to get Terry, let's try to get Terry!" But now that I see this, I'm more than content with the book. I think that working with other people has changed John's approach to the book a little bit. I think he's putting a little more effort into the storylines, too.

DWIGHT: *He's got more time now.*

MIKE: That probably true too, the time factor. But I just think that **John Byrne** has been doing some better work lately. I really feel that the book is coming back to life. Not that it was bad, but I just think it's improved a lot! Of course, it was just the editorial reins that brought John up by the bootstraps. But,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NEW COMICS

"Ditko surprised me by being easygoing."

really, we have no trouble working with John. He's someone who takes the ball and runs with it, while we trip up and occasionally fool him and maybe he gets a little mad.

DWIGHT: *You've been dealing with some first-stringers here, like Craig Russell, Steve Ditko, John Byrne. It must be a challenge to juggle all these different creators' egos —*

MIKE: They are all different. You can't even say, "Well this is how I'll deal with this type."

DWIGHT: *Artists you deal with one way, writers in another way.*

MIKE: Basically, I think Mike and I are pretty comfortable in our relationship as an editorial team with these people. **Ditko** really surprised me by being so easy-going. For some reason I expected more resistance and more, perhaps, discontentedness — is that the word?

DWIGHT: *Because he's been around since the beginning?*

MIKE: Maybe because he's been drawing comics for ten years before I was born, and he had left Marvel in whenever — you know — it seemed like we should be careful. But after we came to grips with the character we were dealing with — we started being the editors of ROM the same issue that **Ditko** started penciling it. Things just really fell into place, and I think **Ditko's** doing the best work he's done in, well, maybe it's just that I'm seeing it differently, because I'm seeing the pencils coming in and I'm really paying attention to the storytelling, but to me, his stuff looks great. I can't remember seeing stuff this great since SPIDER-MAN or DOCTOR STRANGE or Warren. Probably if I look at the other stuff, it's just as good. That happens all the time. I'm liking his stuff more and more.

DWIGHT: *What does Michael Higgins do when he punches the clock and heads for home?*

MIKE: Breaks it? *(Laughter.)* What **Michael Higgins** does when he heads for home is he melts into his living room, grabs some **Grateful Dead** tapes — the private collection — and gets lost in space, so to speak.' Sometimes I work at home, but not like I used to — I'd leave work and bring home hours and hours of work to do there.

DWIGHT: *We're talking lettering.*

MIKE: Actually, at this point, it's less lettering, and I try not to leave the office with it.

DWIGHT: *I notice you still do lettering corrections for your books.*

MIKE: Basically, I've *tried* to swear off lettering, just because working 9-to-5 *and* 7-to-3 in the morning is too much. I just couldn't face all those pages any more.

DWIGHT: *They're in my dreams! Another page!*

MIKE: Twenty-four hours a day, I was attached to paper, so I just got tired of doing that. I thought maybe I should slow down a little bit, so I didn't do a book for a long time. Perhaps an occasional logo, perhaps an occasional correction — but, I took on a five-issue limited series which I am nine and a half pages into.

DWIGHT: *Who's writing it?*

MIKE: It's produced by **Barry Windsor-Smith.** The only thing he couldn't do is letter it, so being the assistant editor on the book, I very cleverly told him to get **Jim Novak** to letter the book, but Barry asked me to do it and I couldn't say no because to me, he is the *most* talented of comic book artists. I have loved his work for years, and just the opportunity to have his original pages in my possession — even if it means I'm going to letter them — is a thrill. So I said yes to that.

And I'll do a really good job on that — or else I'm off it!

DWIGHT: *You're not working on a tight deadline?*

MIKE: No. I am tired of doing fifteen pages overnight because this book is due. I had ten pages for months and nobody's asked me for them. It's tough, but it's a project I really care about.

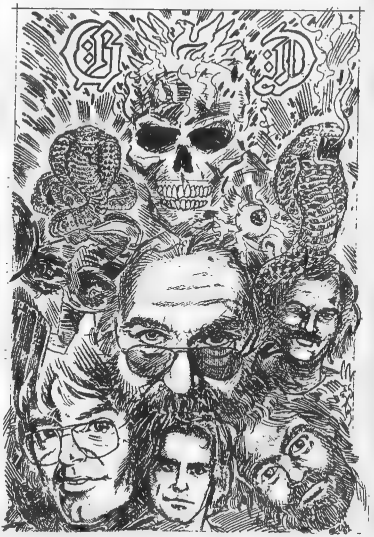
DWIGHT: *I'll look forward to it.*

MIKE: Other than that, I'm doing a little coloring and I'm getting a little better at it. Usually, though, no one asks me unless it's late Friday and the book is going Monday.

DWIGHT: *It seems that a lot of work is given out to people who just happen to be around.*

MIKE: Yeah, a lot of people who are not here would be doing so much more work if

An original Grateful Dead tribute by Mike.



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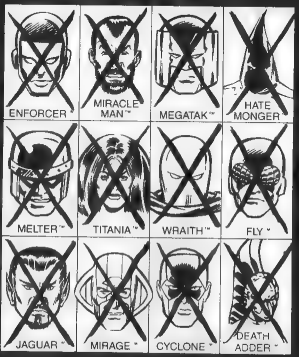

AND ONLY ONE MAN CAN STOP HIM!!

CAPTAIN AMERICA

THE HUNT FOR "SCOURGE."

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"In my life there have been three manias."

they were just around, because it's a question of timing — your availability at the right moment. That's basically how I got back here again. They needed people who could come into the office and perhaps letter eight pages the same day. They would say, "Who's not already doing something?" "Who can we get right now?" And I would take jobs like that. I'll take coloring jobs because it's something new to me. I still have a little trouble with it — I can't just get what I want every time. I still have to say, "Oh, I blew this one." Six shots later, I finally get a panel that can be used.

DWIGHT: *What does Michael Higgins think about comic books and the industry in general?*

MIKE: Well, comic books is probably the thing I know most about. I mean, after that I know a lot of this thing or a lot of that thing.

DWIGHT: *You know the Grateful Dead!*

MIKE: Well, actually, in the course of my life there have been three great manias. The first one was DARK SHADOWS, which is an old horror series. After that, I was addicted to comics. I *lived* comics! Everything was comics. I have, practically, every Marvel comic since FANTASTIC FOUR #1. Don't have them all, but I have most of them. I was a big, big comic fan. Then after that, once I started working here, my new "greatest interest in life" is the **Grateful Dead**. I see the **Grateful Dead** something like forty times a year now, and to me, there's just nothing like it. Basically, I take off whenever necessary and go to a few shows. That's how I enjoy myself.

DWIGHT: *What would you like to do in the future? I assume you would like to be an editor?*

MIKE: I hope to be an editor, but that's something I never really planned on. It's like I had never planned to be a letterer. I suspect that I could easily be an editor someday, but it's not something I'm aiming for, though it could happen and I would be comfortable.

DWIGHT: *What would you like to see happen in comics?*

MIKE: I'd like to work on some new characters — new books. I was just talking minutes ago to **Craig Russell** about the possibility of coming up with a new title — not that he would be pencilling it or writing it, but getting a good penciller, a good writer, if he would be interested in inking it. That's the kind of thing that's beginning to appeal to me. Working on a book — just isn't. I've had a lot of fun working on books like the FANTASTIC FOUR. It's a lot of fun to be involved in a book like that. And I've enjoyed ROM. I never liked ROM until I became the assistant editor of the book, and it's been a lot of fun. That's one of the good things that happens. I would like to draw or write a comic sometime. I'm not really pushing that. I was happy to see that — I think his name is **Todd Klein** – a DC letterer wrote his first comic book recently. A writer/letterer, that looks nice. That was amusing to me. I think it was an OMEGA MEN, or something.

DWIGHT: *Yeah, it is.*

MIKE: But I find that intriguing. I'm sure someday I will draw at least one comic. I don't know if I'll do more than that. That's it! I'd like to do everything at least once.

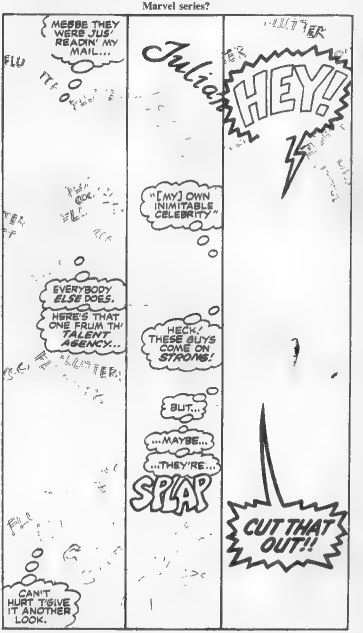
DWIGHT: *Since you are an assistant to Mike Carlin, we should mention him a little.*

MIKE: That makes sense.

DWIGHT: *What was the difference in editing styles you noticed between Mike Carlin and Bob Budiansky?*

MIKE: I think that one of the biggest differences is that with Mike I can pay attention to the things I'm more interested in, and he pays more attention to the things he's interested in. I'm a little freer to make a decision without having to check back.

Name that book: Can you identify these panels from a Higgins-Eye-View of a popular Marvel series?



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Bob Mercenary is short. He has a big sword. He works very hard. Can you say "bionically reconstructed?" Can you say "Fectoids?" Do you know why the Fectoids would like to find Bob Mercenary? Would you like the Holo Brothers to come to your birthday party? If you had a unicycle and a lug wrench, would you be a bounty hunter? How many mutants live in the toxic swamps of New Jersey?

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FANTAGRAPHICS BOOKS

"I see the Grateful Dead forty times a year."

DWIGHT: *In talking with Mike Carlin, what's been your impressions of what he's driving at as an editor? What's his editorial philosophy?*

MIKE: I think, perhaps, he's funnier than most editors, and I think he'd like to see his books have more comic relief in them, which I think is good. It's not really something I'd think of.

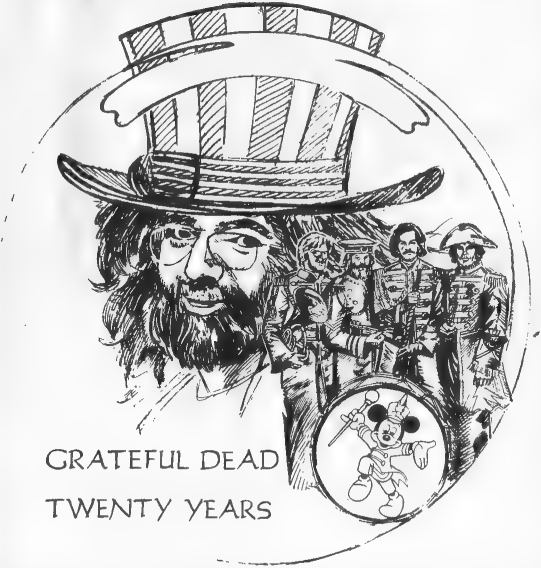
DWIGHT: *He wants to have high points and low points, dramatic points and counter things?*

MIKE: Perhaps that's how it would turn out. The dramatic element would have more comedic elements, because he really is someone who's very concerned with comedy. His first work at Marvel was for CRAZY magazine. He did "Page O' Stuff" and that's the first time I knew who **Mike Carlin** was — when friends of mine started paying attention to CRAZY magazine — finally! They thought that his stuff in it was funny, so I started saying, "Who is this guy?" This is during my leave of absence period. We didn't really get to know each other. We know each other now much more than we did when we were both assistant editors. I also live closer to him than anyone on Marvel's staff. We're both in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn and we head home together a lot. Mike and I got to be friendlier after we began working together, which is a nice idea. I like Mike. I think he's making a good editor. Even if we disagree, we get along.

Sometimes we don't see eye to eye, but that's okay — especially when I turn out to be wrong! I think that's good, that the editor goes with what *he* thinks — has to fight off his assistant, who's obnoxious and loudmouthed about everything — and turns out to be right — while I have to eat crow! Or eat Coyote or something!

DWIGHT: *Any last comments?*

MIKE: Yeah, I'd like to see the **Grateful Dead** play "Dark Star"!



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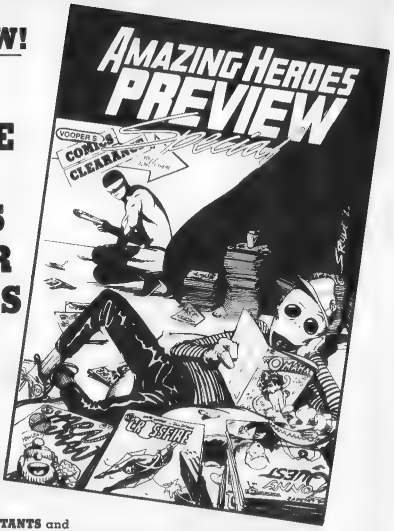

What does **John Byrne** have in store for the new, revamped **SUPERMAN**? What is **Chris Claremont** planning for **NEW MUTANTS** and **THE X-MEN**? Is DC's new **CRISIS OF THE SOUL** anything like **CRISIS ON INFINITE EARTHS**? Will **Alan Moore** continue to write **MIRACLEMAN**? What three **John Byrne** reprint comics are scheduled for next year? Will **AMBUSH BUG** return? How about the **SILVER SURFER**? And what about **Frank Miller's BATMAN** series, anyway?

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"We use the TITANS drug comic in class."

MIKE FLEMING

Mike Fleming works in a public school. He is a typical American. He and his wife, Joanne, were married in 1978 and they have two sons, Zachary who is five and Adam who is three. The only thing in any sense atypical about him is that he is a comic-book collector, and in that sense he is a typical American comic collector. He began reading comics at about the same time he learned to read. His interest grew steadily and it wasn't long before he began saving his comics, evolving therefrom into a full-fledged panelologist. Once a week he goes to his friendly neighborhood comics shop and checks out the new arrivals, and we think you will find interesting what he has to say...

DARREL BOATZ: *To start off, what is a teacher's aide?*

MIKE FLEMING: It's someone who helps the teacher in the class, who takes up the slack.

DARREL: *And how do you become one?*

MIKE: You need to take 30 hours of college courses, and then you apply for the job.

DARREL: *Do you need a certificate of any kind?*

MIKE: No.

DARREL: *How would you define your involvement with comics?*

MIKE: I'm an avid collector.

DARREL: *Gee, I thought you were a comic collector.* (Laughter.) *What are the sort of things you collect?*

MIKE: Just about everything. Independents. Marvel. DC.

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Michael Fleming.
Born: 21 November 1954 — Granite City, IL.
Residence: Mattoon, IL.
Occupation: Teacher's aide.
Training: Three years college in special education. Lakeland Community College, Mattoon, IL, two years. Eastern Illinois University, Charleston, IL, one year. Education continuing.
Loves: Comics, History, Music, Science-Fiction.

"Marvel's been doing a number on people."

DARREL: *Do you have a particular favorite series?*

MIKE: *(Pause.)* Right now?

DARREL: *Yeah — or overall.*

MIKE: Overall it would be the "Manhunter" series from DETECTIVE COMICS.

DARREL: *That was...*

MIKE: ...about '73 or '74.

DARREL: *DC recently reprinted that series. Did you get the reprints?*

MIKE: Yeah.

DARREL: *What did you think of them?*

MIKE: I thought the series was just as good today as it was ten years ago.

DARREL: *What do you think of all the reprints that have been coming out lately?*

MIKE: I think Marvel has been doing a number on people by putting out anything they can get their hands on. DC has been more careful with what they put out. They've been reprinting things deserving of being reprinted in quality packages. I don't usually buy reprints, because I've often got the originals, but I have been picking up some of the DC stuff.

DARREL: *What do you think of the packaging and the subsequent high prices of these reprints?*

MIKE: I think the packaging is great, and I think the price is in line with the quality of the DCs and some of the Marvels.

DARREL: *What are your impressions of CRISIS ON INFINITE EARTHS?*

MIKE: I think that is excellent. I'm real excited about it. I've heard a few things about what might be happening that I'm really looking forward to — like the two Earths coming together. It's about time!

DARREL: *It should be interesting what they will eventually be left with.*

MIKE: Yeah — who leaves, who dies, who takes whose place. I've heard some things, rumors, about what they'll be doing with Flash and Green Lantern.

DARREL: *What do you think of that Supergirl dying?*

MIKE: Well, I hate to see the character go. She had a lot of potential that was never realized.

DARREL: *You were telling me a story earlier about something that had happened around the time when they changed from her original costume.*

MIKE: Yeah. We were talking about the movie and how they had her costume changed for that, which I think was a shame. But, if you will remember, back when they decided to get rid of her original costume they gave her a closet full of costumes and invited the readers to send in their own creations. Well, I sent one in, and my costume looked a lot like the one she ended up wearing full-time. They never did give anybody credit for having created that costume, as far as I know, and now it's gone forever.

DARREL: *Well, you never know — it could be revived with another character.*

MIKE: That's true. I hope so.

DARREL: *What sort of independent publications are you interested in?*

MIKE: Pacific.

DARREL: *Pacific's gone, Mike.*

MIKE: Well, I was. First.

DARREL: *Any titles in particular?*

MIKE: E-MAN. AMERICAN FLAGG. That's my favorite series right now. THE ELEMENTALS — whatever company they're with.

DARREL: *Comico.*

MIKE: That's right. The ELEMENTALS've been around a bit. That's why it's hard to remember where they are.

DARREL: *It's interesting, in fact, that quite a few series have bounced around the independent circuit a bit.*

MIKE: Like T H.U.N.D.E.R. AGENTS.

DARREL: *Yeah. Some of the Pacific titles are turning up in different places now. From what I understand, MS. MYSTIC will be coming out from Continuity.*

MIKE: Only if **Neal Adams** gets the work done. *(Laughter.)* I really wish he'd get it together.

DARREL: *One thing I'm curious about —*

Does the President read comics? Only Mrs. Reagan knows — and she's not telling. She did, however, write this message for the NEW TEEN TITANS special issue.

THE WHITE HOUSE

Dear Friend:

Don't let anyone tell you that you can't be a hero. You can--and you are about to learn how.

Picture yourself in a battle. In fact, it is one of the most important battles our nation has ever fought. You are right in the center of combat. Sound incredible? It is all part of being a hero.

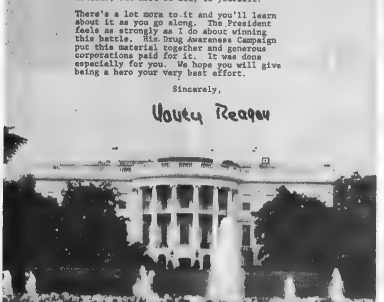
Is this an imaginary battle? Not at all. Many young people are already in it and they would do anything to be on the winning side. But they've learned about it too late.

The battle is against drug abuse. Declare that you will stay drug-free. At any cost. You're guaranteed to win. And you'll be a hero--to your mother and father, family and friends, but most of all, to yourself.

There's a lot more to it and you'll learn about it as you go along. The President feels as strongly as I do about winning this battle. His Drug Awareness Campaign put this material together and generous corporations paid for it. It was done especially for you. We hope you will give being a hero your very best effort.

Sincerely,

Nancy Reagan



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"I wish Neal Adams would get it together."

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have you ever used your interest in comics towards your work in any way?

MIKE: What if I say no? *(Laughter.)* Yes, actually. We have a class where we used the TEEN TITAN drug comic from Keebler and DC.

DARREL: *Oh? Really?*

MIKE: Yes, really. You're acting like you didn't know that. *(Laughter.)*

DARREL: *How did you work that?*

MIKE: Well, basically, I gave the class the comic and we read it aloud. Then the kids had to write a paper about how they felt about it.

DARREL: *That seems to be a bit more extensive involvement than I ever experienced with educational comics when I was in school. The few times teachers used them with my classes, they just handed them out and that was the only thing they did.*

MIKE: Well, I felt it was important to have the class experience the comic in the class, considering the seriousness of the subject — drug abuse. If I'd just handed it out and let it go at that, more than likely they'd just throw the comics away. I don't think half of them would have bothered to read it. When they first saw what was coming there were quite a few groans from the class.

DARREL: *Not too many of them into comics?*

MIKE: That's right.

DARREL: *What age group are we talking about?*

MIKE: We're talking about a group of ten kids between the ages of thirteen and sixteen.

DARREL: *Um. . . perhaps you should explain about your class.*

MIKE: It's a class for kids with behavior disorders. They come from eight counties, a large area of land in east-central Illinois, to our school in Mattoon. We're part of a special education program.

DARREL: *And what is a behavior disorder?*

MIKE: It could be something like an inability to follow directions. Some of our kids are chronic runaways. They are kids that have a hard time in their home schools, in regular schools, and have to be put into a special program where their problems can be dealt with. They have psychological or emotional disturbances of varying degrees.

DARREL: *Rather than physical or mental problems, which would be what most people would associate with special education?*

MIKE: Right. And they are often more intelligent than people think.

DARREL: *Getting back to the comic, what did they think of it?*

MIKE: Two of the kids thought the comic was stupid, but the rest enjoyed it. On the whole they thought it handled the subject well. They were very impressed by the scenes where the different kids were talking about the drugs.

DARREL: *Did it seem to you that the message had. . .*

MIKE: Yeah, I think that the message that drug abuse is bad was received and understood by everyone.

DARREL: *From what little I know of child psychology and classroom dynamics, you have to have a mixture of positive and negative reinforcement.*

MIKE: Yes.

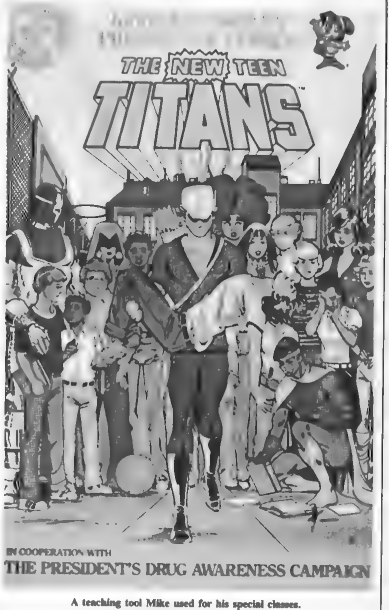
DARREL: *The comic is a negative reinforcement, in that it teaches, "No, don't do this."*

MIKE: Well, that is a positive influence against a negative situation.

DARREL: *I was wondering if you thought there was any positive reinforcement in the book?*

MIKE: Yes, I think there was. It's a fairly good story and the artwork caught their attention long enough to get the message across. It has a positive intent.

DARREL: *Yes, but it teaches "don't take drugs because these bad things will happen to you." I'll admit that I have a limited un-*



A teaching tool Mike used for his special classes.

"Alcohol is a legal drug for adults."

dersanding of psychological engineering — a lay understanding — and you know better what we're talking about, but my understanding is that this is a negative reinforcement because it emphasizes the bad things. I was wondering if it has a positive reinforcement where it teaches, "Don't take drugs and these good things could happen to you?"

MIKE: I don't think so much that — you can't make those kind of promises, really. The emphasis is that drugs are trouble. The moral is the connotation that drug abuse will get you into a lot of trouble, that it is bad.

DARREL: *But it still seems to me that there was a kind of subliminal positive reinforcement in the comics.*

MIKE: How do you mean?

DARREL: *Well, there are scenes in the comics that aren't emphasized — that aren't actually parts of the story — where you see people having fun playing basketball or so on.*

MIKE: Ah, I see what you're getting at. You have these scenes in the background or off to the side, away from the action, where people are having fun doing everyday things, and the implication is that these are people who are not taking drugs.

DARREL: *Right. The subliminal message is that drug abuse, aside from being bad because of what it does to you, is also bad in terms of what it will keep you from.*

MIKE: Yeah, I agree with that. The emphasis, actually, is that these good things don't happen to people who are taking drugs, which is really the way it should be. You can't really promise that these good things will happen if you don't take drugs, because there are too many other factors involved in that. But you can promise that the bad things will happen, and that the good things won't, if you do take drugs — these are facts. I don't know what documentation exists to support these facts, but I'm sure there is some somewhere.

DARREL: *Are there any other topics that you would like to see handled in such a way as drugs were handled in these educational comics?*

MIKE: Sure. I would like to see somebody do an educational treatment of alcohol abuse, which is another form of drug abuse. There is a big difference between drug abuse and alcohol abuse, in one respect, because with alcohol you are talking about a socially acceptable and entirely legal drug.

DARREL: *Not when you're talking about juveniles!*

MIKE: That's true, but there is still a difference, because of the fact that alcohol is a legal drug for adults, even when you are talking about juveniles.

DARREL: *Okay. Any other topics?*

MIKE: Child abuse. Children really should be taught how to avoid being abused and what they should do if they are.

DARREL: *I read recently that Marvel has come out with a comic that . . here it is in my notes. "Marvel Comics, in cooperation with the National Committee for Prevention of Child Abuse, has produced a comic titled SPIDER-MAN AND POWER PACK to combat sexual child abuse." How you seen this?*

MIKE: No.

DARREL: *Would you use educational comics that appeared on these other topics?*

MIKE: Yes, if I thought they were good treatments of the subjects.

DARREL: *Would you do pretty much the same thing?*

MIKE: I think so. I might make one change and have the kids play some of the roles. They might get more out of the experience that way.

DARREL: *Archie Comics recently announced that they'll be devoting space in their titles to the problem of missing children.*

MIKE: Really? Their regular titles?

DARREL: *Yes. They are going to be running pictures of missing children and giving tips about how to avoid potentially dangerous situations.*

MIKE: Great. Wonderful.

DARREL: *If somebody, say, came out with*

ANYWAY, SETH WORKING AT THE GAS STATION!
AND SINCE YOU LIVE IN BLUE VALLEY, I THOUGHT YOU'D WANT TO KNOW...
YOU'VE GOT IT, PAL. I DON'T WORRY ABOUT ANYTHING.
"BEING RESPONSIBLE!"
WHEN THE PROTECTOR ASKED KID FLASH FOR A FAVOR, KID FLASH AGREED, AND TOOK IT UPON HIMSELF TO SEE THAT HE DID A GOOD JOB. THAT'S WHAT BEING RESPONSIBLE IS ALL ABOUT: THAT NO MATTER WHAT THE CIRCUMSTANCES LOOK LIKE OR FEEL LIKE, KID FLASH COULD BE COUNTED ON. WHEN YOU UNDERSTAND WHO'S IN CHARGE OF YOUR LIFE, YOU UNDERSTAND WHAT BEING RESPONSIBLE MEANS.
CIRCLE THE LETTER OF THE ANSWER THAT YOU THINK SHOWS THE MOST RESPONSIBILITY.
WHO'S RESPONSIBLE IF YOU'RE LATE FOR SCHOOL IN THE MORNING?
(A) YOUR MOTHER, FOR NOT MAKING YOU UP?
(B) YOUR KID BROTHER, FOR NOT PRACTICING HIS BASS DRUM AT YOUR HAND-UP TIME?
(C) YOU, FOR NOT SETTING YOUR ALARM CLOCK?
WHO'S TO BLAME IF YOUR KID BROTHER GETS INTO MISCHIEF WHEN YOUR MOTHER LEAVES YOU TO BABY-SIT FOR HIM?
(A) YOUR KID BROTHER, WHO THINKS THE KITCHEN IS A REAL HEAT PLAYGROUND?
(B) YOUR FOLKS, FOR LEAVING HIM WITH YOU?
(C) YOU, FOR NOT REALIZING THAT YOUR PARENTS TRUSTED YOU TO WATCH YOUR BROTHER?
YOU AND A FRIEND APPLY FOR THE SAME SUMMER JOB. SO GETS IT AND YOU DON'T. WHO'S RESPONSIBLE FOR YOU LOSING OUT?
(A) YOUR FRIEND, WHO DIDN'T BUY YOU THE RIGHT CLOTHES?
(B) THE BUS DRIVER, WHO BROUGHT YOU TO THE INTERVIEW LATE?
(C) YOU, FOR NOT SELLING YOURSELF TO THE STORE OWNER AS BEING BEST FOR THE JOB?
THERE'S A PARTY IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD THAT ALL YOUR FRIENDS ARE GOING TO. YOU WON'T BE INVITED OR WELCOMED UNLESS YOU SMOKE DOPE WITH THEM. WHO'S RESPONSIBLE IF YOU GO AND SMOKE WITH THEM?
(A) THE KIDS THROWING THE PARTY?
(B) YOUR FRIENDS, WHO ARE ONLY TRYING TO IMPRESS ONE ANOTHER?
(C) YOU, FOR NOT QUESTIONING WHETHER THIS WOULD REALLY ENHANCE YOUR BODY OR MIND?
HAVE YOU EVER USED ANY OF THE OTHER ANSWERS IN YOUR LIFE? (FOR DISCUSSION.)

Learning ethics from superheroes, part of a teacher's guide to the NEW TEEN TITANS.

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"His needle marks would have shown."

an educational comic about child abductions, would you use that?

MIKE: I think so.

DARREL: *How do you think they should handle that topic?*

MIKE: I think the emphasis should be on what to watch out for and what to avoid. Archie Comics seems to have the right idea. The one thing I would caution them about is that they should make every effort not to come out with something that could be a primer for pedophiles.

DARREL: *How you used comics in any other ways in your work?*

MIKE: Not really. This was the first time.

DARREL: *What did your co-workers think of your using a comic in class?*

MIKE: Well, they really weren't involved in it. I was in charge.

DARREL: *If you were working in a regular school with a regular class would you have used the comic?*

MIKE: Yes.

DARREL: *Would you have used it in the same way?*

MIKE: Yes. Basically, this comic was designed for an eighth grade reading level. That would have been the only determining factor as to which of the comics I would have used.

DARREL: *Do you know what the reading levels are for the other two drug books, the one with I.B.M., I think, and the one with the cola organization?*

MIKE: No, but I think you can tell from the age group of the kids at the center of the stories what the target groups are.

DARREL: *What did you, as an avid comic collector, think of the comic itself?*

MIKE: I thought it was very good. It was excellent as far as getting the message across. It reminded me in some ways of the old GREEN LANTERN AND GREEN ARROW series, in how it delivered a message.

DARREL: *That series handled quite a few relevant topics.*

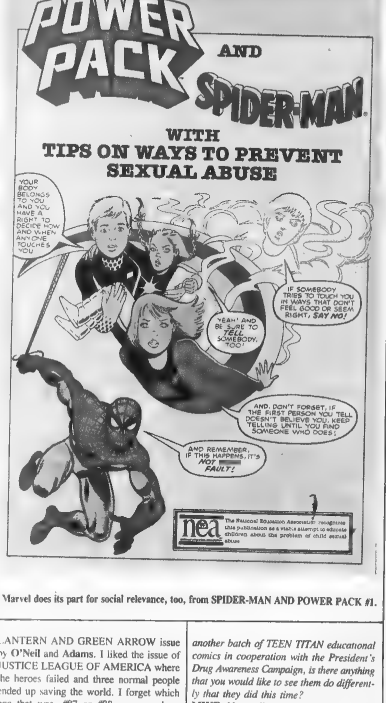
MIKE: Social issues. That was where they first introduced Speedy's drug abuse. I remember I wondered for awhile why they didn't have him wear his costume in those issues. I suppose they didn't want to show him in his costume, the heroic image, against the light of his addiction — but it also occurred to me that his costume has short sleeves and the needle marks would have shown. I don't think I've seen him in long sleeves since, at least not for a whole story. If that ever happens I think I'll start worrying.

DARREL: *Do you have a particular favorite comic — an individual story?*

MIKE: Well, let's see. THUNDER AGENTS #1, the one where Menthor died, was a good one. I liked the first GREEN LANTERN AND GREEN ARROW issue by **O'Neil** and **Adams**. I liked the issue of JUSTICE LEAGUE OF AMERICA where the heroes failed and three normal people ended up saving the world. I forget which one that was, #87 or #88 — somewhere around there, I think. There were a lot of good comics from DC in the late Sixties and early Seventies. Marvel was going through a "we don't know what we're doing" period, although there were some good ones there, too.

DARREL: *If DC were to come up with another batch of TEEN TITAN educational comics in cooperation with the President's Drug Awareness Campaign, is there anything that you would like to see them do differently that they did this time?*

MIKE: Not really. I think they did an excellent job. I'd like to see them put the same quality into anything else they might do — keep the level up. If they can improve on what they're done I'm all for it, of course, but the care they've shown already is tremendous. They put a lot of love into these comics, and that's the important thing.


POWER PACK AND SPIDER-MAN
WITH TIPS ON WAYS TO PREVENT SEXUAL ABUSE
YOUR BODY BELONGS TO YOU AND YOU HAVE A RIGHT TO DECIDE HOW AND IF ANYONE TOUCHES YOU
IF SOMEBODY TRIES TO TOUCH YOU IN WAYS THAT DON'T FEEL GOOD OR SEEM RIGHT, SAY NO!
YEAH! AND BE SURE TO TELL SOMEBODY, TOO!
AND, DON'T FORGET, IF THE FIRST PERSON YOU TELL DOESN'T BELIEVE YOU, KEEP TELLING UNTIL YOU FIND SOMEONE WHO DOES!
AND REMEMBER, IF THIS HAPPENS, IT'S NOT YOUR FAULT!
nea
The National Education Association recognizes this publication as a first attempt to alleviate children's fears about the problem of child sexual abuse.

Marvel does its part for social relevance, too, from SPIDER-MAN AND POWER PACK #1.

THE TEEN TITANS AND SOCIAL ISSUES

01. BRAVE AND BOLD #54 (reprinted in DC 100-PAGE SUPER SPECTACULAR #21), "The Thousand-and-One Dooms of Mr. Twister" (Page 2, Panel 3), Batman and Robin on different sides of the generation gap.

02. BRAVE AND BOLD #83 (April-May 1969), "Punish Not My Evil Son" (11, 3) Kid Flash, Speedy, Robin and Wonder Girl disagree over proof of guilt.

03. BRAVE AND BOLD #94 (February-March 1971), "Rebels In the Streets" (15, 3-6, Kid Flash searches Gotham City for a hidden nuclear bomb.

04. BRAVE AND BOLD #102 (June-July 1972), "Commune of Outcasts" (15, 3), Speedy and Kid Flash help out with an urban renewal project.

05. DC COMICS PRESENTS #26 (October 1980), Teen Titans Preview (1, 2), Robin is presented with a terrorist situation.

06. NEW TEEN TITANS #2 (December 1980), "Today the Terminator" (8, 2), Changeling, Starfire, Robin and Kid Flash — the warrior mentality.

07. NEW TEEN TITANS #4 (February 1981), "Against All Friends" (25, 1), Starfire, Hawkman, Green Lantern, Wonder Girl, Zatanna, Batman, Wonder Woman, Raven, Kid Flash, Changeling and Cyborg at the revelation of deceit.

08. NEW TEEN TITANS #7 (May 1981), "Assault on Titans' Tower" (21, 7), Raven mediates between Cyborg and Dr. Stone, a dispute between relatives.

09. NEW TEEN TITANS #8 (June 1981), "A Day in the Lives" (6, 7), Raven encounters revolutionaries.

10. Ibid, (15, 6), Cyborg's first encounter with Sarah Simms and her class of paraplegic children.

11. NEW TEEN TITANS #18 (April 1982), "A Pretty Girl is Like A Maladi" (24, 7), Robin prevents the Russian Starfire from committing a mercy killing.

12. NEW TEEN TITANS #21 (July 1982), "Beware the Wrath of Brother Blood" (22, 5), Robin battling cultists.

13. NEW TEEN TITANS #26 (December 1982), "Runaways" (15, 9), Raven encounters a teen runaway with many problems.

14. NEW TEEN TITANS #27 (January 1983), "Runaways" (16, 4), Speedy, Starfire, Wonder Girl, Cyborg and Robin go after gangster who have been exploiting teen runaways in their drug running operation.

15. NEW TEEN TITANS #29 (March 1983), "First Blood" (22, 5&6), Phobia forces Speedy to relive his withdrawal from drugs.

16. NEW TEEN TITANS #35 (October 1983), "Siege" (13, 3), Changeling goes inside a hostage situation.

17. NEW TEEN TITANS #38 (January 1984), "Who is Donna Troy?" (21, 7), Robin gets a confession about a baby-selling racket.

18. NEW TEEN TITANS #1 (August 1984), "Shadows in the Dark" (7, 4), Wonder Girl, Jericho, Nightwing and Cyborg — Jericho, the mute super-hero, has trouble communicating.

19. SHOWCASE #59 (November-December 1965), "The Return of the Teen Titans" (21, 2), Wonder Girl, Kid Flash, Aqualad and Robin wonder how to prevent a riot.

20. TALES OF THE NEW TEEN TITANS #1 (June 1982), "Cyborg" (17, 8), Cyborg experiences Amputee's Trauma.

21. TALES OF THE TEEN TITANS #42 (May 1984), "The Judas Contract" (20, 2), Cyborg and Terra, what happens when you push too far.

22. TALES OF THE TEEN TITANS #45 (August 1984), untitled (4, 8), Changeling faces gun runners.

23. Ibid, (21, 2), Aquagirl and Aqualad succumb to polluted waters.

24. TALES OF THE TEEN TITANS #48 (November 1984), "Recombatants" (4, 4), Cyborg faces muggers.

25. TALES OF THE TEEN TITANS ANNUAL #3 (1984), "The Judas Contract," Terra's finale. Sociopaths are becoming more comnon every year.

26. TEEN TITANS #4 (July-August 1966), "The Secret Olympic Heroes" (10, 1), A bomb explodes over a crowd including Robin, Speedy, Kid Flash, Aqualad and Wonder Girl.

27. TEEN TITANS #5 (September-October 1966), "The Perilous Capers of the Terrible Teen" (4, 1), Aqualad, Kid Flash, Robin and Wonder Girl visit a liberal reform school named Lacklock.

28. TEEN TITANS #6 (November-December 1966), "The Fifth Titan" (4, 2), Elasti-Girl and Beast Boy, the misunderstood teen.

29. TEEN TITANS #9((May-June 1967), "The Big Beach Rumble" (9, 2), Robin and Wonder Girl slightly out of costume as Robin makes a plea for ecology.

30. TEEN TITANS #13 (January-February 1968), "The TT's Swinging Christmas Carol" (24), no reason, but I love Wonder Girl's Christmas outfit.

31. TEEN TITANS #14 (March-April 1968), "Requiem for a Titan" (7, 5), Kid Flash, Aqualad and Wonder Girl experience distrust of Robin.

32. TEEN TITANS #15 (May-June 1968), "Captain Rumble Blasts the Scene" (18, 2), Aqualad, Wonder Girl, Kid Flash and Robin as violence begets violence.

33. TEEN TITANS #18 (November-December 1968), "Eye of the Beholder" (6, 5), Aqualad and Wonder Girl watch while Robin ends a political arguement between Kid Flash and the Russian Starfire.

34. TEEN TITANS #19 (January-February 1969), "Stepping Stones for a Giant Killer" (23, 1), Aqualad extols the joys of baby-sitting to Speedy, Wonder Girl, Robin and Kid Flash.

35. TEEN TITANS #21 (May-June 1969), "Citadel of Fear" (6, 2), Wonder Girl listens to the militant Hawk and the pacifist Dove continuing the argument that lasted their entire sporadic careers.

36. TEEN TITANS #23 (September-October 1969), "The Rock'n'Roll Rogue" (3, 3), Robin announces as Wonder Girl debuts her new costume to quell a riot.

37. TEEN TITANS #25 (January-February 1970), "The Titans Kill a Saint!" (16, 3), a peace rally explodes with violence and Wonder Girl, Kid Flash, Speedy and Hawk fail to prevent the death of a Nobel Prize winner.

38. TEEN TITANS #26 (March-April 1970), "A Penny for a Black Star" (19, 2), Lilith and Mal break down racial barriers a little.

39. TEEN TITANS #30 (November-December 1970), "Greed Kills" (6, 5), Mal solicits a charitable contribution.

40. Ibid, "Some Call it Noise" (3, 1), Aqualad and Aquagirl take in a concert in a story about noise pollution.

41. TEEN TITANS #31 (January-February 1971), "The Order is to Destroy" (10, 3), Lilith, Kid Flash, Wonder Girl, Speedy and Mal are ordered attacked in a story about mind control.

42. TEEN TITANS #33 (May-June 1971), "Less Than Human" (15, 3), Gnarrk witnesses a bit of dirty business.

43. TEEN TITANS #38 (March-April 1972), "Nameless, Wander I" (2, 4), Lilith searches for her biological parents.

44. TEEN TITANS #45 (December 1976), "You Can't Say No to the Angel of Death" (17, 3), Robin, Wonder Girl, Kid Flash, Mal, Aqualad and Speedy review the results of terrorist activity.

45. TEEN TITANS #49 (August 1977), "Raid of the Rocket-Rollers" (12, 3), Robin, Kid Flash, Harlequin, Bumblebee, Hornblower and Speedy appear at a United Fund benefit.

46. WORLD'S FINEST #205 (September 1971), "The Computer That Captured a Town" (20, 2), Wonder Girl and Lilith take exception to treatment by Kid Flash and strike a blow for Women's Lib in a story about how the good old days weren't always so good.

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LAST WORD

Comics Interview 234 Fifth Ave. Suite 301 New York, NY 10001

"WHY CAN'T WOMEN BE MORE LIKE MEN?" (OR WHATEVER)

Dear DAK & Co.,

COMICS INTERVIEW #24 was a great relief after #23. Nothing personal against gi ant Japanese robots, but I could've lived without (almost) an entire issue being devoted to them.

Among the recurring topics in your first 24 issues worth of interviews, the questions of 1) Why men read comics and women don't and 2) Why men can't seem to write believable women in comics, seem to be touched on most frequently, this month's talk with **Karen Berger** being a good example. Not to be rude, but the longer this debate goes on, the more convinced I am that the whole thing wouldn't be such a problem if only people would quit agonizing over it so damn much!! Give it some thought, and most of the preconceptions talked about in this magazine (and others) can be shot full of holes, anyway. For example:

1) "Women write relationships better." [CI #24] Really? Then how do you explain Harlequin Romances? Or the two-inch thick potboilers that clutter up libraries and bookstores (most written by women), that make the Harlequins seem like Shakespeare in comparison? Personally, I'd take the latest SPIDER-MAN (or just about any other "male power fantasy") over 'em any day.

A hard-boiled dick with a twist. Collins & Beatty's MS. TREE from Renegade Press.

2) "Male writers can't write female characters well." (I've lost track of how many times this one has popped up.) How come the people who say this almost always cite LOVE & ROCKETS a few paragraphs later when it's a contradiction of the idea? Likewise AMERICAN FLAGG!, wherein the women may *look* like inflatable dolls, but — thank God! — sure as hell don't act like 'em! Or **Milton Caniff**'s diverse cast of women in STEVE CANYON? And so on, and so on... All I've noticed among the people who do lousy depictions of women is that they generally do equally bad depictions of men. (Chalk it up to optimism, or too much **Claremont**, or whatever you like...) Conversely, **Los Bros Hernandez** do a great job on Maggie, Hopey, and Luba, but people do them a disservice by not talking about L&R's *men*. What about Heraclio: One of the few convincing "happily married" men in comics? Or Rand Race, who's compassionate and fallible as well as charming and sexy? (And I'd kill for a pinup of Speedy!)

3) "Women don't like/read superhero books." Who says so? I don't know many female fans, but we've all cut our comic-collecting teeth on the likes of X-MEN and THE TEEN TITANS. (Whether that speaks well of us or not depends, I suppose, on your opinion of superheroes...)

As for the feasability of getting a larger female audience by reviving all those romance comics — YECCHH!! Since when is 22 pages of tear-jerking and handkerchief-twisting any more interesting than 22 pages of fistfights? One extreme is as bad as another.

4) "Guys are dumb." [CI #19] That doesn't explain most of the ones you've interviewed, especially **Scott McCloud**. (Now that Eclipse has dumped ZOT! maybe Fantagraphics'll pick it up and put their money where their mouth is.) And **Matt Jorgenson**, another not-so-dumb guy wanted to know "what is it about the female characters that bugs you?" [CI #21] Well, to me it's the tendency of writers to try *too* hard sometimes, in which case you get characters like Stephanie Starr or **Chris Claremont**'s bitchy version of Jess Drew/Spider-Woman. If writers had more faith in their own instincts and less in how everyone says "women are supposed to act," maybe things would get better. I remain hopeful...

Enough with the soapbox this month! Thanks for finally interviewing **Collins & Beatty**. And I can't believe that **The Mad Maple** has only been "around" since '78: To someone who started this crazy hobby well into the '80's, he seems as much an "institution" as **Lee & Kirby**'s FF. (My subscription service even ran an "I am TM Maple" contest a few months back. All you had

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to do to win was get a letter printed in every comic that hit the stands the following month.) Hearing from **Karen Berger** was both fun and frustrating, since I've read both AMETHYST and SWAMP THING for several months, and started the LEGION with #16, only one month before the just-announced, "new readers' issue"...AARRGGHH!! (All I want to know, Karen, is this: Even though "boys don't like women with green skin," is it bad form for girls to like *men* with green skin? Brainiac 5 is my favorite Legionaire thus far— the most charming, intriguing, infuriating know-it-all this side of John Constantine (who?) — even if he *is* covered from neck to ankles in purple cloth and doesn't wear a torn shirt like the She-Hu—er—I mean, that *other* green-skinned person...)

Amy Sacks
(Deep in the Heart of Jersey)

OLD TIMERS DON'T HAVE BIG EGOS

Dear David and Lesley:

Now we're having fun! I'm talking about issue #24 of COMICS INTERVIEW.

At last someone has taken the time to interview **Sal Buscema**! Sal, like many other artists in the business, has been and is still overlooked by fandom for the great storyteller that he is. So many fans today are spellbound by a flashy style, but fail to see that flash doesn't always mean good storytelling.

I have found that when you talk to the "OLD-TIMERS" of the business you don't run into big egos. That's refreshing, considering the way most people in the industry take themselves way too seriously. Sal has proved that you can still pump out top-quality work on a deadline. I've never been one that's followed the new creators' saying of "Do you want it fast, or do you want it good."

I was glad to see that you covered the ever-growing T-shirt business with nice guy **Bob Chapman**. I got to meet Bob in Chicago this year at the big Con. He took the time to explain a lot of the business to me and I was very impressed. While I was there I picked up a couple of T-shirts from Bob. CEREBUS, LOVE AND ROCKETS, and my favorite, STEVE CANYON. The nice thing about these shirts is the fact that they are 100% cotton and not this 50/50 crap. I wish the best for Bob and the gang at Graphitti.

This brings me to the **"T.M. Maple"** interview. The only thing that I didn't like about this interview was the fact that it was too short. You should have done a two-parter. It is always interesting to see what other comic-book readers have to say about comic books and things in general "T.M." showed us all what letter writing is all about. "T.M." is a throwback to the days of real letter-hacks. People like **Jerry Bails**, **Roy Thomas**, and **Mark Evanier**. "T.M." made a very good point that all comic-book readers should pay heed to. If you don't like a book don't buy it! That says it all. Maybe in time more people will follow this way of thinking.

Thanks again for a fun issue. Stay outta trouble.

Stephen Scott Beau Smith
711 6th Street W
Huntington, WV 25704

IT'S A MAD, MAD, MAD MAPLE

Dear Dave,

Who is this vile imposter passing himself off as **T.M. Maple** in #24!?! Looks like it's time to contact my notoriously successful and incredibly tough lawyer, **C.K. "Maximum Dollar" Maple!**

Ha, ha! Just kidding! (Dave, you can get up off the floor now.)

Since the estimable **Mike Sopp** kindly sent me a transcript of the interview, I was familiar with the contents of the piece (complete with relatively-minor errors) and thus the introduction was what interested me the most. The guesses about my age, *et cetera*, were intriguing. Naturally, I can neither confirm nor deny these suppositions. (But then, I'd be happy and satisfied if you were wrong, wouldn't I?) So, I have a voice that "radio stations kill for," eh? Gee, maybe I could get a job as a DJ? (Hey, maybe I already *am* a DJ! I'll have to check up on that!) It is interesting that no one has mentioned the pos-

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT'S

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sibility that I could have hired a professional actor, briefed him on my background, and then have been sitting beside him to slip him relevant notes and other advice during the interview. After all, do you people know just how devious I really am?

You, of course, lied a teensy bit when you said that the readers now know all that interviewer **Gary Mugford knows**: You didn't publish the entire interview. Now, this isn't really all that horrible since it leaves open the possibility of a special baxter reprint of the entire transcript I can see it now: "The **T.M. Maple** Interview: The Special Edition." NEW YORK TIMES Bestseller List, here we come!

You should be getting a letter from **David Alan Wright** any day now since you misspelled his name. (Actually, his real name is **Rabid Alien Bite**. Just call him that and you'll have no problems at all. Trust me.)

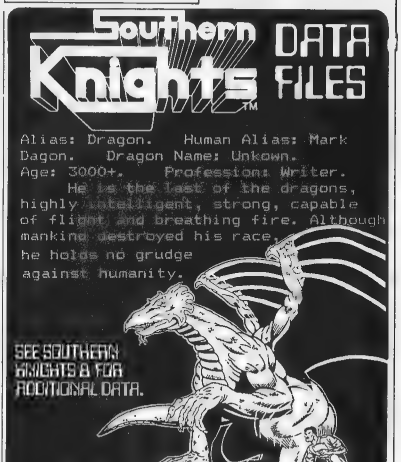
Even apart from my interview (or is that "especially apart?") I thought this was one of your better issues so far. Each subject had an interesting approach to the field, some of which conflicted with one another. I think that one thing the subjects of the first four interviews have in common is that they do not get enough credit or respect in fandom-at-large. Perhaps this will improve now that they've gotten some exposure. (Giving deserving-but-underrated talents exposure is a useful function of COMICS INTERVIEW!)

One question: Do you think I might have blown my secret ID when I bought fifty copies of #24? You see, ever since, there's been this bunch of shady-looking characters following me around and. . .What's that? Oh no! It's the door and. . .ARRGGHHH!!

"T.M. Maple"
Box 1272, Station B
Weston, ONT M9L2R9

PS: Phew! My fears were unjustified. It was just a gang of renegade insurance agents. (Though that can be plenty frightening, too, let me tell you!) You sort-of complain, Dave, that I never provided you with a photograph of myself. Let it not be said that The Maple does not try to accomodate the press! Enclosed please find a photograph. Now, I won't say which person in the photograph is me. After all, I don't want to make things *too* easy for you!

PPSS: You compared me to **David Steinberg**?! What a ridiculous notion! In fact, forget you ever heard that name in connection with me! I mean, there *is* no connection! Oh no. Trust me.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Alias: Dragon. Human Alias: Mark Dagon. Dragon Name: Unkown.
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SEE SOUTHERN KNIGHTS 8 FOR ADDITIONAL DATA.

ENJOYED FIRST 25 ISSUES

Dear David,

Unaccustomed as I am to writing letters of comment as my phone bills will attest to, I thought I'd drop you a line and comment on COMICS INTERVIEW #25 and perhaps ramble a bit.

Yes, the **John Byrne** interview is huge and while I enjoyed it, I feel it would've been better titled **John Byrne** talks about the FANTASTIC FOUR, as it covered nothing else save a few token comments. . . What about **X-MEN**, which actually brought John into the forefront of fan recognition? While I surely can't speak for everyone else, John added a special something to that title which hasn't been seen since. No one can tell me that John didn't add to the overall story content of the mag, which no one else has done since. They merely appear to follow **Claremont**'s scripts; John enhanced them.

Also, extremely little space was devoted to ALPHA FLIGHT, what he intends to do with THE HULK, and his Charlton work. . .lastly on the subject, IRON FIST, and to elaborate further on his comments regarding THE HOW TO DRAW COMICS

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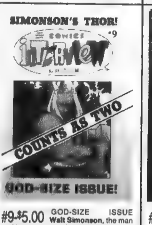

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COMIC from Solson Publications, which has been advertised as being written by him and which he spoke about briefly in a recent COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE.

Let me say that I have enjoyed the first 25 issues immensely and look forward to the next 250 of same. Interviews I would like to see would be with such people as: **Gill Fox**, art director and artist for the legendary Quality Comics group. **George Evans**, Golden Age & EC artist who is currently doing the SECRET AGENT CORRIGAN comic strip. **Alan Moore**. I know you've done him already, but can we ever get enough of this man (or is that moore of him?). **Frank Robbins**, exponent of the **Caniff/Sickles** school, best known for SCORCHY SMITH, currently residing somewhere in Mexico last I heard. **Jay Ward**, alias Bullwinkle's pappy. **Dick Moores, Rick Veitch** (THE ONE), **John Severin**, and probably a hundred others if I sat here and thought about it, but then you may not see fit to print this.

Leave us not forget the Fan In The Street interviews! Always interesting, keep them coming. By the way, did you notice I never mentioned SHE-HULK once?

Larry Shell
P.O. Box 45
Irvington, NJ 07111

AN OUTRAGE!

Dear DAK,
WHAT!!?!

104 pages devoted to a **John Byrne** interview — and not *one word* about the Anti-She-Hulk Committee? This is an outrage! What a colossal oversight on the part of interviewer **Jim Salicrup**.

Byrne is the biggest She-Hulk booster around, and I'd love to hear what he has to say now that we've finally gotten him to back down and remove the Green Woman from the FANTASTIC FOUR.

I know that I'm not exactly one of **Byrne**'s favorite people, since he made me the villain in the latest FF (#284). I got to torture S.H. for a few pages, and even though she won in the end, I don't mind, since I know I'll get back at her. The character in question was known as "Dutta," and I'm sure he'll be back some day to get his revenge on She-Hulk. And next time he'll win!

We'll show **John Byrne** we're not fooling around. We won't be content just getting the Green Woman out of the FF — we won't stop until we've destroyed her for good! And not even **John Byrne** can stand in our way!

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